UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE GIFT OF FAILURE: TEACHER COMMITMENT IN THE POSTMODERN CLASSROOM

by

Jean-Claude Couture ©

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

How might teachers find commitment in the postmodern classroom? Against the backdrop of growing calls for accountability, competition and technology integration, how might teachers find hope and agency? Drawing on an action research approach informed by a psychoanalytic cultural critique, I map out possibilities for teacher commitment. These possibilities for commitment flow from challenges I encountered in four locations: working on gender issues and media literacy, participation in a high stakes testing program, efforts to integrate technology in the classroom and lastly, a student leadership development program. In each of the four locations I draw on a Lacanian aesthetic that works the hinges between the psychic registers of the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real.

I embrace from Lacan and Zizek a hopeful ethical call to teachers: we must accept that the self-sufficient image of our 'selves' is an act of misrecognition. Commitment lives in the split life we live in-between desire and prohibition where we continually mediate the sacrifice that cannot be made, the reward that cannot be achieved. The psychoanalytic mode of cultural critique offers teachers the analytical tools that will help us find renewed expression and fulfillment.

Dedication

To my children, Jarek, Mandara, Xanthe

and for Pat.

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Chapter 1

The Culture of Performance

Much of a teacher's work today is mediating the anxieties society has for its young. As teachers struggle to shift their identities and practices towards a pedagogy that is more sensitive to gender and class issues and as revolutionary information technologies make their way into the classroom, it is time to engage fundamental questions of what professional commitment means for teachers. Today teachers find themselves caught within the growing contradictory demands of the New Right for accountability against the backdrop of declining resources. As Darling-Hammond (1996) writes,

> Standards must be higher and more exacting, outcomes must be measurable and comparable, accountability must be hard-edged and punitive, and sanctions must be applied almost everywhere – to students and teachers, especially – although not to those whose decisions determine the possibilities for learning in schools (p.5).

Teacher's work is being transformed by the "new ruthless economy of globalization" (Head, 1996, p. 2), where 'quality education' is equated with scrutiny and control. Heather-jane Robertson (1998) describes how globalization and corporatization are undermining the goal of maintaining equal access for all students to public education. More importantly, these challenges coexist within a societal breakdown of faith in the authority of public institutions and professional expertise (Usher & Edwards, 1994).

Gee and Lankshear (1995) describes the paradox schools face. The buzzwords of *participation*, *collaboration* and *flattened hierarchies* serve to mask the profound cultural shift of workers who labor in "fast capitalism." Under "fast capitalism" work is organized around three activities: tightly linking resources to outputs; sophisticated and precise surveillance; and, JIT delivery (getting the customer what is wanted when it is wanted) (p. 103).

What might *commitment* mean for a teacher in the postmodern classroom? I share the sentiment raised by Richard Kegan (1994) that, with the unprecedented demands placed on teachers, educational research now needs to build a fundamental and practical critique of the culture of performance.

The culture of performance has attempted to bring strict realism to classroom life. Saul (1995) cogently describes the tendency towards performativity as a variation of corporatism. The symptomatic effects on our society are profound. Consider the current health of teachers in Alberta today. Psychological problems, including stress, were the primary reasons for teachers to go on extended disability leaves. Such leaves represent 34.5 per cent of the extended disability benefits of claims. According to 1994 statistics compiled by the Alberta School Employee Benefit Plan (ASEBP) "ulcers, depression, and migraine headaches were the chief complaints of teachers and other school board employees" (*ATA News*, 1996, p. 3). In Alberta in 1995, payouts for the antidepressant Prozac rose by 33 per cent.

While statistics about teachers' mental health are difficult to obtain there is widespread consensus that, in provinces such as Alberta, "stress and psychological consultation and medication are up" (Al Summers, Secretary -Treasurer of St. Albert Public, as reported in *St. Albert Gazette*, December 23, 1995). These incidental reports resonate the findings of the ground-breaking study by Jevne and Zingle (1994) on teacher health that explored both educational related variables along with physical and personal related factors. What is sounded clearly in the study is the highly relational nature of teachers' difficulties – the reality is that "issues related to teacher health are systemic" (p. 235). King and Peart (1992) thoroughly documented the increasing pressures teachers faced nationally before substantial cuts were made to public services in the mid-nineties. The impacts of the cuts to education in Alberta and how they demoralized teachers has been outlined by Harrison and Kachur (1999). During the 1996/97 school year Alberta had fallen well below the national average in terms of spending on education.[1] Parents scrambled to make up for declining resources through fund-raising and providing volunteer services. Ironically, amidst all of these cuts to public schools, private schools received unprecedented funding increases.

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[1] Per student spending in Alberta stood at $5,848 while the national average was $6,045. Spending in 1998 – 99 is still 12 percent less than when the Klein cuts began in 1993/94. While many provinces choose to reduce deficits through a combination of revenue increases and program cuts, Alberta's strategy was striking in that it choose to reduce its deficit primarily through program cuts. 57 percent of the deficit between 1992/93 and 1993/94 was eliminated this way compared to Ontario where 32 percent of the deficit was eliminated this way.

The research on teacher stress and disability leaves due to psychological factors is clear. Individuals on disability leaves are not deficient in coping skills nor are they to be characterized within a simple binary of being "unhealthy" *vs.* "healthy." The exhaustive interviews and psychological profiles of the educators and administrators in the Jevne and Zingle (1994) study convinced the researchers that issues of control over working conditions, personal identification and sense of self, largely contributed to the occurrence of disability leaves. These teachers were described by the researchers as "living with broken dreams." Teacher stress is clearly attributed to a sense of lost hope. This struck me in the following passage:

> (among healthy teachers) there was evidence of denial, of the onset of symptoms, of feeling less, and making efforts to continue… unlike the expectations of some (initially including the researchers), the "healthy teachers" are not immune to eventual difficulties (p. 125).

Despite the numerous recommendations by Jevne and Zingle (1994) aimed at fostering a more conducive working environment for educators in the Alberta, there is little evidence the general climate for teachers has improved since the study was published five years ago. This growing sense of malaise about their lack of professional autonomy was expressed clearly in the publication of *Trying to Teach* 1993 by the Alberta Teachers' Association. Resonating throughout the report was the coherent message that teachers feel committed to teaching – they want only to be given the necessary resources and trust to do the job.

Teachers are not alone in their growing sense of frustration with the conditions of public schooling. A recent survey suggests that a growing number of Ontario school board trustees are refusing to run for office again, citing increased time pressures and school board amalgamation as factors that are making their jobs difficult (Arnott, 1999). With their roles devalued under increased provincial control, many trustees ask, "What is the point?"

The situation in Ontario is especially significant given the call by the Harris government for tighter controls on the teacher profession and the need to define, in precise terms, what the "standards of practice" are for effective teaching. The appointment of a Manager of Standards of Practice and Education for the Ontario College of Teachers signals an effort to button-down the meaning of 'good teaching'. This suggests, as Martin (1999) argues, that the attempt to remove tensions and uncertainty from teaching practice is a first step towards the diminishment of teaching as a profession. Increasingly teachers live in between two worlds: one full of the strict realism of externally measured learning outcomes and test results and the other full of fecundity of the daily life of the classroom. I recall a telephone conversation with a colleague last February. As we were discussing a project she interrupted and said, "Sorry, got to go now, some kid has his tongue frozen on to a slide." As the gap grows between these two worlds, so does the difficulty for teaching and teachers.

Living the Divided Life

Parker Palmer (1998) describes the paradox of many in the helping professions as living a divided life (p. 167). While Palmer resists identifying the source of this malaise, he does evocatively describe the increasing remoteness and alienation that teachers feel. Those that manage institutions such as public schools are well-intentioned, teachers report a growing split created by a sense of dislocation. It is in the sense of living one thing and believing another that much of contemporary teaching is about. Consider these comments from a first year teacher:

> I'm a new teacher with no continuing contract. The other day I did it to myself. Twenty-seven students in a grade three room and five of them with severe emotional problems and learning difficulties. No teacher aid. The kids are calling out, interrupting and half of the time I don't know what I am doing. For most of the kids, I am doing a good job, I think. But for those five other students, I'm lost. I know the district really supports integration so when the principal asked me how it was going, I smiled and said, "Good." I misled him because I really want to keep my job, I love teaching.

Another teacher writes:

> No more... teaching diploma exam courses. The other day a parent complained that I didn't get her daughter through the grade twelve

> diploma exam okay. I didn't go into teaching to get kids through exams. Early retirement – six more years to go.

One teacher stuck, the other choosing to leave the profession. To live, as Palmer writes with one's self 'divided' is an increasing condition of teaching. This condition is not about teachers who live with some naïve, romanticized image of the past, but about the emotional gridlock and increasing energy expended on arriving at someone else's destination. To admit to our complicity in taking children to places we ourselves would rather not go is the beginning of recognizing the malaise that public school teachers find themselves in. As well as living other people's dreams (i.e. the New Right's agenda for schools), teachers are confronted with doubts about their ability to meet the needs of the increasingly complex classrooms they face. Increasingly teachers feel like imposters.

> I've been at this for eight years and I still live wondering one day will they ever find out... find out that half the time I do not know what the hell I am doing. I love the kids but the new courses every semester and the big classes mean that I am in crisis management mode most of the time.

Jane Tompkins (1991) writes in the *Pedagogy of the Distressed* about her anxieties in teaching. What Tompkins expresses is a deep fear that one day she will be discovered for what she is – a fraud. Tompkins writes that her early anxieties as a teacher were not about helping students learn but with:

> a) showing the students how smart I was; b) showing them how knowledgeable I was; and c) showing them how well prepared I was for class. I had been putting on a performance whose true goal was not to help the students learn but to act in such a way that they would have a good opinion of me... how did it come to be that our main goal as academicians turned out to be performance?" (pp. 16-17).

Tompkins answers her own question: "Fear for being shown up for what you are: a fraud, stupid, ignorant, a clod, a dolt, a sap, a weakling, someone who can't cut the mustard." Naming our fear is perhaps the beginning of our possibility of locating our commitment as teachers. As Palmer goes on to argue, identity is not a shiny thing, polished and smooth for all to see. Identity is shaped from the bricolage and moments that give form to our integrity and the (mis)recognitions. Yet teachers feel "they are in over their heads" (Kegan, 1994) and research across North America continues to link poor working conditions with increasing levels of burn out (Abel & Sewell, 1999; Friedman, 1991, 1995; Jenkins & Calhoun, 1991). In Alberta one of the authors of the report, *Trying to Teach* (1993), concluded "teachers love their jobs, the kids and teaching – they want to be left alone to do what they were trained to do" (personal communication, 1994).

Four *Site/Sight(s)* of Commitment

I will undertake my research by examining four locations in my teaching practice where challenges emerge to my personal and professional identifications as a teacher. I will explore how these identifications and commitments are indicators of the "radical inhabitability of the habitat" of teaching in the postmodern classroom (Kristeva,1991). I speak of the sense of radical inhabitability within Lacan's hopeful gesture of recognizing our own mis/recognitions as a rich source of enablement and possibility.

I come to this manuscript as I did to the four locations I write: coming to places that I do not entirely belong. The first research location will involve my role as an instructor in a Women's Studies course at a community college. In this example I will explore the personal identity issues that surface for me around my role as a white, heterosexual male instructing a university course that engages questions of sexual identity, desire and structural violence towards women in the media. The second site involves the growing pressures on teachers to respond to the calls for accountability in public education. In particular I examine the role of high-stakes testing in Alberta as it moves teachers further into a sense of lost jouissance as they are increasingly barred from the unmasterable breach between the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The third situation will describe the challenges faced by my colleagues and myself while attempting to integrate technology into the classroom. The changes in student-teacher relationships and the shifts in my identity as a teacher will be examined here drawing on the questions of cognition and knowledge formation raised by Coyne (1995) and Joyce (1995). I conclude with a fourth research site that involves the contradictions that emerge in developing a student leadership program in my high school where I was the Student Union adviser. Here I will examine my reservations about promoting responsible citizenship and student leadership within the modernist discourses of heroic individualism and agentic possibility. This last site concludes with the question of my complicity in acting as both an advocate for student rights and my role as an agent of the school's institutional power.

My (w)ritings will be anchored in two broad complementary research approaches: psychoanalysis and action research. More specifically, I take up Lacanian cultural criticism as a way to interrogate the four locations that are indicative of the teachers' work. My research will explore teacher *commitment* as it is informed by the convergence of my professional work as a teacher and the questions raised in my graduate work in feminism and poststructuralism. I rely too, on autobiography, drawing on my own teacher "biographic situation" and "existential experience" as data sources (Pinar, 1994).

Action research represents the second strand in my study of *commitment*. Action research complements the autobiographical project of teachers critically reflecting about their subjectivity and identity, because it involves them as researchers who must make fundamental decisions about what counts as knowledge and what appropriate actions to take based on an embodied understanding of what is worth learning. Action research is a practical and ethical way to theorize; it represents a struggle to "integrate the processes of pedagogical transformation and theory generation" (Elliot, 1994). The melding of teacher autobiography and action research is a way for me to pay attention to the caution by the feminist scholar bell hooks (1994), when she calls on educators to develop "radically new pedagogical practices" that exposes the illusion that we can ever be "all-knowing, silent interrogators of the world." Or as Felmann (1987) suggests, we need to examine the unanswerable questions of our practice "in passing on understanding which does not fully understand what it understands" (p. 41).

Chapter 2

Contingent Necessities: Navigating the Symbolic, Imaginary and the Real

"The world is not what I think but what I live through" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. 149). Certainly Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological sentiment remains a central image in my first realization that maybe there was something to deconstruction. We must move beyond the notion that the 'good teaching' is to be found in disciplined abstraction and theorizing nor in being satisfied with "mere correctness" (Aoki, 1992, p. 27).

By a fortuitous coincidence I began reading about deconstruction in the summer of 1984 at the same time that I began white water kayaking. The two experiences, one of reading a printed text and the other of reading white water, brought me to realize that Pinar (1992) is correct when he states that phenomenology and deconstruction "calls us back to the body" to an inaccessibility that gives us hope (p. 4). As I grew increasingly comfortable making my way through what I had previously perceived to be the utter chaos of white water and poststructuralism, an awareness emerged in me that I had repressed since childhood: in order to learn the mind must crawl out of the body. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) would describe what took place is the notion that "the primary meaning of discourse is to be found in the text of that experience which it is trying to communicate" (p. 5). At times the body can seem simultaneously familiar and strange.

In white water paddling rivers are graded on a six point scale from one (a current with no waves) to grade six (serious injury or death if attempted). The grading system represents an elastic interplay between the characteristics of the river and improving proficiency of white water paddlers. Over the years I have noticed how the degree of difficulty associated with particular stretches of water has interrogated any hard and fast rubrics for grading a river. I remember in particular a stretch of the Maligne River in Jasper National Park that was graded at level six until five years ago, when two German kayakers successfully negotiated it. The stranger always brings news. Since that time, a number in our paddling cohort have successfully completed this section. As more and more people enter the sport, and as our paddling skills improve, the 'grading system' we employ has become increasingly a cacophony of anecdotal experiences, mathematical formulas measuring volume and gradient, and tall tales of bravado. There remains only an alliance of differences among us as we paddle, a sense that no one knows for certain what constitutes 'difficulty'.

From a Lacanian stance, we negotiated white water within a battery of signifiers. For Lacan the signifier has priority over the signified. It exists within a closed order in relation to other signifiers that represent a subject for another signifier (Evans, 1996, p. 186). A signifier exists by virtue of its ability to take on value separate from other signifiers. It is the differential nature of the signifier (ascribed in relation to other signifiers) that gives a signifier its status. Signifiers take on value solely because they live in a system of differences.

Consider again the grading system for rivers. The grading system purports to be standardized and referenced to a master signifier (S1). Yet we soon see how the chain of signifiers for grading rivers is repopulated with new meanings. As equipment and capability improve over the last decade, what used to be grade five/six are now four/five. I recall my first foray on a grade four river, when I was almost paralyzed with fear. I was comforted by the words from a friend: "Low water this week…no rain…so this should be a three run today." I recall the sense of relief as the, "four rating" that had been trapped in my body was transposed into the three rating.

For Lacan (1979), a symptom may be literally a word trapped in the body (pp. 11-12). I think often of Lacan's "symptom" while initiating new paddlers to the "Eskimo roll." For many people, being trapped, upside down in their boat represents an unspeakable terror. Many only see an image of themselves "trapped", held firmly upside down by the boat wrapped around their hips. They see the boat as a burden, as an obstacle to be shed, rather than a tool to be employed in righting themselves. Paddling grade three and four rivers gave me a place – a point of recognition where my own desire could be recognized. Within the signifying chain of river grading I received the measure/message of my desire.

The symbolic representations of the world give me a place of belonging and a place of recognition. In a Lacanian sense, the place I see myself (as construed through language) exists in the Imaginary.[1] This too is the place of the other, a place where I feel whole, connected in a world full of resemblances.[2] The genesis of the Imaginary is my connection to the mirror stage: an identification I assume within a connection to the Ideal Ego. The Ideal Ego draws its source from the Ego Ideal: the symbolic point that gives me the point through which I am looked at. "Paddling well" means not making too many flailing moves and not succumbing to the inherent incapacity of the body as it flounders in the real (the maw of white water, the chaos of turbulence and the overpower force that wants to engulf me.) It is the ego's identification with the symbolic order of things, with the internalized place of the law that gives the subject a position in the social order. The Ideal Ego originates from the specular image of the mirror stage. It represents the sense of law and prohibition for many paddlers that bailing out of your boat too soon after failing to successfully execute an Eskimo roll marks one as someone who has "lost their nerve." For a paddler caught in a churning rolling massive whole, the ego continually strives to merge with the Ideal Ego – to be at one with the imagined fullness and wholeness of the other. This other is the place from which we are heard, seen and recognized as being "a good paddler." This object of being a "good paddler" is the gaze. The gaze is within us while looking is outside of us. The gaze describes the subject's position in relation to what the eye sees and how the world looks back. [3]

My experience in white water has brushed me up against the amalgam of Lacan's three registers of psychic "reality": the Symbolic, the Imaginary and the Real. Since my "I" can only speak from the place of the other (from the chain of significations that constitute the symbolic), my "I" cannot be construed as me "the subject." Lacan reminds me that the enunciation of the subject (i.e. the "I" who speaks) is an imagined wholeness that is reached for in my struggle to be desired by the other. I live in a symbolic pact with the other, to be seen as the source of the other's desire. For Lacan, the "subject" lives in the unconscious, in the realm of the imagined connections to the other. For Lacan, "the subject is never more than supposed" (as cited in Fink, 1996, pp. 77-78).

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[1] Names given to difficult parts of rivers connote the symptom living in the body. The "Toilet Bowl" was a hole one could only paddle out of by being submerged deep in the river (upside down) and being flushed downstream. "Jaws" was huge boil that continually recirculated and held onto one's boat.

[2] The images of the river are passively presented to the Imaginary whereupon, through the Symbolic, they are assimilated and reconfigured. There is a "visual language" being worked through here. It is through the ego's identification with images that the passivity of the subject is overcome and human agency emerges. Images become "retrospective signifiers" in the psychoanalytic understanding of what happens when a subject plays out the image in the Imaginary. This process is "a mechanism of regulation, of adaptation to the Real" (Lacan, as cited in Berressem, 1996, p. 279).

[3] Chapter 6 outlines more detail of the relationship between the look and the gaze as they relate the formation of Symbolic representation of the image.

As I moved from being tentative and unbalanced in my boat, over time I learned to be as comfortable right side up as upside down. Kayaking gives one a multiplex of centers of gravity. Maintaining one's balance and a degree of control as the entire volume of a river runs through the chute you are navigating means that you must learn to negotiate with *what is given*. Brute force accomplishes little in extreme water. One cannot overpower contingency, only work within the possibilities it gives. To paddle extreme white water one needs to acknowledge the inherent stupidity and incapacity of the body. Survival, 'skill' and agency flows from an outsideness that exits in the maw of the crashing waves and currents whose power far exceeds Reason. 'Playing a hole' or 'surfing a wave' is a *giving in* to a *givenness*. Such is a formulation that connotes the last of Lacan's three registers: the Real.

The Real is not in opposition to the work of the Imaginary. In fact, the Real works through the Imaginary when it provides traces of the little objects of unattainable desire (*objet petit a*).[4] The Real emerges as an "impossible thing to imagine" (Evans, 1996, p. 160), yet and resists totally any effort at Symbolization. The Real is gestured in a number of ways. One is through anxiety or trauma, where a missed encounter or something (the *tyche*) which lies beyond ourselves leads us to act. In its most simplistic sense, the Real can be implied from "an objective, external reality, a material substrate which exists in itself, independently of any observer" (p. 160).

There is a deep hermeneutic gesture at work here (Caputo, 1987). Playing in this sense, acts as a form of *paralogy* in reading the river as a mediated text. Human culture is constrained and enabled by creating what Lyotard (1983) would characterize as 'little narratives' about paddling. Just when one kayaker rides a hole in what seems a definitive way ('the only possible way'), another paddler comes along to re-construct the nature of the hole as a possibility for human artifice. For Fiske (1993), these differences in paddling technique would be called "accents." In a Lacanian sense, different paddlers draw from the real differing Imaginary possibilities through resignifying the river. In our group we call these differences *style.*[5] Without "the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles" (Suits, 1978, p. 4), playing loses its appeal. Kayaking has taught me that Keran Egan (1992) is correct in claiming that "our culture is our nature" (p. 118) and that we bring our subjectivities to bear on the holes we ride. Enactivism speaks eloquently to this experience. Varela (1995) describes the sense of the widened horizon experienced through the transformative possibilities of "releasing the everyday world from the clutches of the grasping mind" (p. 254). In terms that enactivism frames "embodied action" and "codependent arising," riding a powerful hole in white water locates one as "the I of the storm."

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[4] jagodzinski (1996) illustrates that since the signifier can never be tied down we are condemned to be unable to say the truth: it remains an extimate kernel that remains elusive. A crucial example is the role the Phallus plays in the Real. The Phallus exists as "an insistence" that is the 'purveyor of truth' (p. 221). The desire to have the Phallus that belongs to the Real is part of the complex of the drives, whose goal it is to achieve jouissaance (impossible enjoyment with its traumatic effects). jagodzinski draws from Žižek that the

As the overpowering noise and sheer force of water consumes me I sense an enfoldment that makes my sense of agency invisible. Skill is left behind in the moments of being held by what Aoki (1992) would call the "seductive hold" of what appears as "uncannily correct and elusively true" (p. 17-27). Aoki describes the image of the broken pencil; the moment of interruption that arrives and calls us away from the content of what we are writing. "Suddenly the content of our writing disappears and goes into hiding, and the pencil that we really did not see before comes out of hiding to reveal itself to us" (p. 20).

It is in the experience of 'breaking' that we are able to *be-hold* what is that *beheld* us. Like the kayaker who suddenly loses control or his grip on the paddle, the "seductive hold" of the hole becomes a churning maw that interrupts the *uncannily correct and elusively true*. In teaching, as in kayaking, there is the strict relentlessness of everyday life in schools. Moments of engagement and possibilities for hope must be seized through

---

Real is gestured by *the Thing* that cannot be symbolized (p. 537). It is the extimate kernel (sinthome) around which the subject (in the unconscious) is formed.

[5] In the last couple of years the most proficient paddlers affirm their agency in more radical ways by entering the hole and surfing in it with their bare hands.

a watchfulness and pedagogical mindfulness that phenomenological writing in education has spoken so forcefully about in the last two decades (for example see Aoki, 1992, and Pinar, 1994).

Over the last few years I have been struck by the comments made by colleagues who have experienced 'burn out', stress and continual frustration in a way that suggests that they have lost their sense of playfulness, of contingency and of their willingness to live the inherently conflictual life that is teaching. Teaching is not supposed to be easy. Sometimes it may be made impossible. Sometimes we are thrown into necessary obstacles that make our hope seem impossible.

Teachers are reluctant to reveal their failures (Couture, 1988). What I struggle for in mapping out teacher commitment is the sense of locating languages of possibility that will return a sense of agency and being held in the necessary obstacles of everyday life. These obstacles call for forms of representation of teachers' work that recognize fluidity and hybridity, that, as Pile and Thrift (1995) suggest, tell stories about the terrors and successes, the transparencies and opacities of living (p. 49). Ethical teaching refuses the strict realism of routine and instrumentalism. It lives within an Imaginary that calls forth an Ideal Ego we often have difficulty acknowledging. As Parker Palmer (1998) reminds us, "we became teachers because we once believed that ideas and insight are at least as powerful as the world that surrounds us" (p. 20).

More Troubled Waters?

> My irreplaceability is therefore conferred, delivered, "given" one can say, by death. It is the same gift, same source, one could say the same goodness and the same law. It is from the site of death as the place of my irreplaceability, that is my singularity, that I feel called to responsibility. Derrida (1995, p. 41)

My teaching is simultaneously invigorated and paralyzed by the inaccessibility of Reason. I struggle, like other teachers, trying to know my students. Three students spoke to me as they struggled as human subjects who were, as Lacan reminds us, people who have come to places that they are not (Reinke, 1997, p. 19). These stories suggest to me the possibility that teaching is properly understood as a an active engagement of failure and loss.

Thomas was a student of mine in 1996. We grow very close together over the school year in our social studies class. Marked as a "special needs student," he was neither isolated nor widely recognized by his peers. Thomas was just one of many students in a large high school who lived the ambivalence of a good enough life.

I remember the warm summer Monday morning when I walked into school and a colleague called me aside. "Have you heard about Thomas – he shot himself over the weekend." Events unfolded quickly. Everyone struggled with the impossibility that this event represented to us. Questions emerged as if they might bring him back: *How could he? What could we have done?* What I learned later from Thomas's parents was that he had taken the family car for a joy ride that weekend. With his parents away Thomas figured he would be free to spend the weekend driving his friends around town. Unfortunately for Thomas he was caught speeding without a driver's license. His note to his parents was startling in its guilt and shame. Blaming himself for being "stupid and irresponsible," Thomas lamented "I really let you down so what else can I do?"

"What else can I do?" was Thomas's rhetorical question that of course everyone else had an answer for. I recall students and teachers alike intoning in disbelief: "Why didn't he just hang on and wait – his folks weren't going to get that upset?" " Surely he knew he could work this out?" Anyone who knew Thomas well would know none of these answers would suffice. Thomas always wrote about the cruelty and injustice he saw in the world. At times he felt overwhelmed, writing once about homeless people, "how can people be so insensitive to suffering – can't we take some responsibility for others?" For Thomas, what was done to "others" (homeless people, animals, refugees, the Jews) was a recurring theme in his assignments. Lost in his own dissonance, "It just isn't fair," was a common refrain in his writing.

After I was invited by Thomas's family to read the eulogy, I realized too that I was lost by Thomas's question: why are things not fair? I felt so lost in his decision to kill himself. It just didn't seem fair within the economy of my view of the world. Such a small misdeed – such a big price that had been paid. Despite all my ruminations and occasional retreat into attempting to explain what Thomas had done, I began to take some refuge in the realization that, like Thomas, we are all to some extent orphans of the strict symbolic registry of a world that sees us as much as we see it. Desire is the reason we see. As we look at the world we are invested in an exchange of glances between what is *out there* and what *out there* sees in us. We always look at the world invested in sites/sights of meaning and power (Pile & Thrift, 1995, p. 46).[6] We live, desiring as we do, as subjects that see and are seen by the world. Both the fetish and the mirror elaborate Lacan here. The viewer wants to look at the object but can only do so within a visual code of difference: what is fair/not fair; what is for me and what is not. What one sees is then mirrored back as part of one's identity and identifications. It is in the closure and fullness that the viewer finds in the object where the fetish exists. In a sense, the object is purified through one's associations with the self. [7]

We live in a world whose spectral economy is refracted by our imaginary identifications and affective investments. A world where there is no pain or injustice; a world where pleasure and death live side by side. Seeing is an exchange of representations between the subject that tries to map the world and a world that tries to map the subject.[8] Living in the paradox of the world, as Kristeva (1993) writes, challenges the master signifier of Reason. "I do not believe it is possible for a rational system, based on the data of consciousness, to respond to the evil and horror that exists in the world" (p.5).

Thomas's decision to kill himself will always remain with me as an inaccessible strangeness. As I struggled through the eulogy I recalled using his favourite jokes to try to capture his world, to draw on his sense humour and the joy that was his life. There was also his love of rap music. I recall as well when he got into trouble; Thomas would frequently draw a line from his favourite movie *Apollo 13*, "Houston, we have a problem."[9]

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[6] The economy of *looking* and *being seen* is further discussed in Chapter 5.

[7] As Pile and Thrift (1995) describe, "In order to ensure the safety of the viewer the object must be turned into something familiar, but this defence is radically unable to deal with the strange: the (UN)seen other is placed as fetish and phobia" (p. 47).

[8] For Pile and Thrift, authority is located when identity is concealed as a truth (p. 49). Similarly, for Lacan, the struggle for truth is a narcissistic closure (impelled by the drives and fantasy) where the supremacy of the demand is invested in the signifier. Taken to its logical conclusion, such investments are symptomatic of the death drive. The entry into the Symbolic is an expression of the death drive.

Perhaps Thomas loved fairness too much. He knew when he got into trouble he would have to, in his words, "face the music." I remain inconsolable, wondering about what Thomas was thinking up until the last moment. This is an uneasy labour, a labour of the economy of the unconscious that recalls me to question other sacrificed lives.

'Living Over Our Heads'

Robert Kegan (1994), a leading therapist, described the growing malaise among those in the 'helping professions' in his book, *Living Over Our Heads*. For teachers and students both, modernity asks us more than we can give. Against the invocation of the master to "give of yourself," the average American CEO makes 70 times the average wage of US workers. In Canada, the growing gap between rich and poor is exacerbated by the income disparities between skilled technical workers, whose weekly incomes is $842, and service employees, whose average wage is $367 per week (Economic Council of Canada, 1999).

What we sacrifice is a 'givenness given to us' that remains mired in the dissymmetries that make up our own subjectivities. Such is the story of two students, Sandra and Jason. Both students are accomplished Student Union leaders who represent, in the modernist discourse, exemplars of "student leaders."

From the intertextual spaces that are their stories, I draw Derrida's reading of living in the breach of failure. For Sandra, Jason and Thomas, 'being a loser' represents being accountable to master signifiers that rob them of their hopes and desires. Yet, struggling for jouissance, they repopulate the signifier 'loser' with new meanings. Theirs is an accountability to that which no one else can take away from you. Within their stories I raise the question: can the occasion of their sacrificed lives be a place for conceptualizing the teaching within a Lacanian sense of emerging possibility from the trajectory of the negative? In the specular economy of the gaze, can we have as our first point of departure an invocation to live in the little deaths of our daily failures?

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[9] I recall Thomas suggested that Apollo 13 was a great movie because it was about 'sticking together no matter how shitty things got'. He once confessed, "I would have freaked out up there but it wouldn't be so bad if you were with other people."

> Abraham doesn't speak, he doesn't tell his secret to his loved ones. He is, like the knight of faith, a witness and not a teacher, and it is true that this witness enters into absolute relation with the absolute, but he doesn't witness to it in the sense to witness means to show, teach, illustrate, manifest to others the truth that one can precisely attest to (Derrida, 1995, p. 73).

Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, read within a strictly modernist sensibility, is an abomination. It is a blindness or an irrational faith that reflects the dysfunction of a vengeful and patriarchal God. Yet, as I will draw from Derrida (1997), under global capitalism we all live in failure – we live within the necessity to sacrifice what we love the most – ourselves. In Derrida's sense, we all live within the force of one another's gods. We choose the face of God – the face of the abyss – the face of the big Other in a Lacanian frame.

As a Student Union adviser for fifteen years, the modernist assumptions I have troped with my students fall into three "success narratives":

- The self-assured heroic individual (Indicators: "getting it together")
- The coherency of the public space (Indicators: due process, institutional logics)
- Social contractarianism (Indicators: "winning what you can")

These resonate with Lyotard's (1992) critique of modernist educational goals, whose intent is to "produce enlightened citizens" or agents who see themselves as "masters of their own destiny" (p. 97). The sacrificed lives of Sandra and Jason illustrate counter-narratives to the promises of "getting it together" and heroic individualism. Their narratives reflect an understanding of subjectivity as an intertextual space that is enfleshed with meanings.

Sandra is an accomplished Student Union leader in every sense of the modernist ideal. She is dynamic and friendly, spontaneous and intelligent. According to her friends, "Sandra is really hot and to boot she is an honours student." When she speaks she holds the rapt attention of the 800 students that attend the school. After her rapid rise as a junior high grade representative she was elected president of the Student Union in her grade 11 year. Yet she is full of doubts. "My old friends don't talk much to me anymore – some say I'm a kiss-ass for taking on this Student Union stuff." Then there are the numerous times she feels self-conscious standing in front of students at the assemblies:

> I know I have big breasts. I stopped taking showers in Phys Ed three years ago. Anyway, one day I was walking down the hall and these jerks started snickering at me. I hate that. For some guys the math works like this: BIG TITS = SCREW ME. Wearing sweaters doesn't work and I try to ignore them. So I turned around and told them to screw off. I'm tired of this bullshit so I don't take it anymore. Maybe I deserve it though. My so-called former friends say the guys vote for me because they think I'm hot. This sucks!

Sandra shared her frustrations and fears in the leadership course she took with me. "I'm afraid of "losing it" sometimes – you know when everyone finds out you are a fake. Sure I flirt with the guys sometimes, but if I didn't when I was in junior high they would not have voted for me…Maybe I was afraid." She further writes, "Last month I went to a job interview. I heard from a friend that the boss liked girls in short black skirts so guess what I wore to the interview. What was I supposed to do? Either way I lose right?"

Either way she fails. Consider Sandra's phenomenological predicament that we are thrown into the world, called to attend our Dread (Wark, 1994 p. 162). There is in Sandra's words an inhabiting of an unfathomable – an incommensurable – nowhere. Within the specular economy of the male gaze of the "ideal body," Sandra is exposed to the world. Amidst her self-policing and concern for dressing up for the job interview, she ironically writes, "I read in social about this Descartes thing, you know 'I think therefore I am'. For me I don't think, I just find myself doing stuff to avoid losing out. I remember too, writing in the margins of the textbook, 'I diet therefore I am'."

The vigor with which Sandra simultaneously polices herself and poaches Descartes' gestures towards a breach – a self that is both object and subject – a self that tries to rid itself of "its own irreducible presence or presentation" (Derrida, 1995, p. 65). From Derrida, Sandra's self-effacement is a "giving death," a sacrifice that suspends the self in the other, while working this negation as a form of affirmation (p. 66). In

Heidegger's sense, Sandra's fear of "losing out" connotes a subject who dreads in the midst of objects (media images of the ideal body) that threaten to sweep her subjectivity away. For Sandra, and many female students I have taught, there is little coherency in the media-ized, hypereroticized cultural landscape of "adolescence."

Sandra's growing sense of ambivalence as she makes her way through high school does not diminish her capacity to give everything she could to the student union. Despite the abjection and anger she feels, she works hard in many secret ways. Derrida asks, "What is the I, and what becomes of our responsibility once the identity of the 'I' trembles in secret" (p. 92)? The body is the enfleshed site where individual subjectivity meets the social. Sandra once confided in me, "You know, I never thought that it was impossible; I thought that I wouldn't get elected in grade 10. But you know what, the world is full of impossible things like having big tits and a small ass, all the stuff guys like. Maybe that's why I got in as president? It's all a fluke, who knows, eh?"

"Who knows, eh?" Sandra's ambivalence and willingness to go on signals much of what Kristeva sees as agentic possibility:

> The abject shatters the wall of repression and its judgements. It takes the ego back to its source on the abominable limits from which, in order to be, the ego has broken away – it assigns it a source in the non-ego, drive, and death. Abjection is a resurrection that has gone through death (of the ego). It is an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, if new significance (as cited in Bronfen, 1998, p. 409).

Despite her despondency, Sandra still stands up in the face of the world – emerging to tell the boys in the hallway to screw off. *Selbstandigkeit* (standing-by-yourself) and *Wiederholung* (resolute repetition in the face of one's worries and dread) are one's fundamental choices of selfhood. Standing up in the face of the world emerges in Sandra's decision to tell the boys to "fuck off." Yet she shares with many women the difficulty of being Thrown (construed as *nude* by the boys taunting her), into the gaze of the Phallus that signifies women, like Sandra as "big breasted/sluts." As Pile and Thrift (1995) write:

> the mapping of the subject, then, continually reveals ruptures, tears, fraying, an inside-out. The map and the subject masquerade as

> something the are not entirely: every day they put on their (brave face) to fit their bodies into those surfaces of power and meaning with which they are presented but which extend beyond them. The mask/drag, that people use to get them through the day, is a veil which continually threatens to be torn away by the violence of the other (p. 49).

The cultural work of getting the subject to become the object of the gaze is the process by which the subject internalizes the gaze of the other. *Finally to see the world as a man would* is one such manifestation. To turn an object into a fetish is the suture that occurs within the gaze.[10] To close the gap(e) between the signifier and the signified is the move that will eventually bring the subject into the structure of language. For Lacan, the *copula* created between the signifier and signified is the Phallus. As such, no one holds the Phallus since 'it' is a no-thing. I recall an incident several years ago that illustrates the discursive moves that are maneuvers around the no-thing. A female student pushed another into a locker and said, "I'm not a slut, I just like to fuck." Aside from the my teacherly response, "We don't talk that way away around here," I was more stuck by the student's frustration with being called "a slut." As the two students kept yelling at each other, the last comment still rings uncannily, "At least I do what I want to do, not like you – just pretending."

By attempting to uncouple *slutting* from *fucking* the student was attempting a resignification of what being a slut really was. While I risk over-determining the example because of its obvious sexualized nature, the student's struggle illustrates the human agency that is invested in the population of signifiers with meaning. By charging her enemy with "just pretending" the student herself is attempting to fix an authenticity to a particular way of being with the signifier. In this case, being a sexual agent free of the social stigma of being seen to be "a slut."

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[10] The gaze, properly understood, in a Lacanian sense, is at its source, the object of the scopic drive. The gaze is the object of the act of looking. From Lacan, desire is everything (jagodzinski, 1996, p. 183). While we take looking for granted, there remains the desire of the gaze. Our gaze (our desire that brings us to *lack*) can be easily fooled. An exemplar is in the film *The Crying Game* when as a heterosexual male looking at Dill being undressed, I was shocked to be confronted by the fact (s)he had a penis. This well known moment in cinema represents a fleeting unmasking of the scopophobic view where I was lured to leer at the image of Dil as a woman. The point of interruption when the 'truth' is revealed illustrates that my lack always wants to become the gaze. My shock fell way to disappointment as my jouissance fell away. Importantly for me at this moment, I found myself hesitating at the momentary interruption. I then imagined that the unmasked Dil was actually a women wearing a dildo, thus reinscribing my lack with the gaze. To sustain such a move would have permitted me to hold the Phallus once more (the agency of the Father of Enjoyment). As it turned out my reading of the moment was not sustained by the film since Dil was in fact a transvestite. The final point cannot be lost here. The gaze is on the side of the object. (I was prepared by the film maker to look at Dil in a particular way). The look on the outside of the object (the I/eye that sees). When I look at an object the object is already looking back at me. Chapter 6 more fully explores the gaze and the look.

Jason is not a well-liked student who takes an active role in our student union. For three years now he has played a major role in organizing events, including single-handedly raising $10,000 in a 30-hour famine. Jason is not elected. He chooses to be on the student union "even though most people think I'm gay. You know I'm straight, really straight. It really sucks getting the idiotic comments all the time. I don't know why this shit happens to me. They just started in grade 8 and it has followed me up until now. I'm sort of isolated in school, but everybody in the student union is great to me." What is more telling is that he feels marked as "gay" and carries the weight of it in his writing, "I read the other day that a gay teenager in Alberta is 40 times more likely to kill themselves. You know I'm not surprised. When you are picked on no matter what you do, you can't win. I don't try to make sense of it, I just pick my spots."

I tried to stay in close contact with Jason – he just seems to find in our group a place, "a new beginning" he calls it, that he might connect to. "No matter what kind of bullshit I put up with – the stuff like the famine we do is worth it. So I'm a loser – but no one can get me out of this mess. I just keep plugging along."

Plighted Troth: Living the Inaccessible

Shapiro (1992) writes that we need to reinvigorate our discussion of politics and citizen engagement by writing not about what we believe, but what we fear. A first step in this process is to repopulate the signifiers troped in the modernist narratives of citizenship education (embedded in the Lacanian discourses of the University and the Master) with new enfleshed meanings.[11] For example, whose desires are being satiated when the signifier of *corporate citizenship* is circulated in the public space? Can Exxon or McDonald's be construed as subjects that live the effects of their practices? We must recall that the Real is simultaneously included and excluded from knowledge by our investment in the signifying chains that build the Symbolic Order (Bracher, 1993, p. 53-56).[12] The Real gestures, "What is a word (the signifiers of *citizenship*) if it gives us no world to live in?" A Lacanian ethics calls us to signify all effects of signification, particularly in terms of the master signifiers. Where is the location, the *habitus*, of "citizen"? We are citizens in whose (seeing) eyes? Consider the etymology of *civitas* (to live in a city) or as in Rome to be equal (from *equs*, to own a horse). In a world where "Planet Reebok" circulates as a maker of globalism where are we left – in a world where 40 percent of all shoes sold annually are athletic runners? Consider too the GNP, a measure of the dollar value of goods and services. What do these signifiers tell us about ourselves? What is the story behind the "GDP" when the O J Simpson trial added $200 million to the US economy – the equivalent of the GDP of Grenada. As one of my students sarcastically asked, "Clinton's getting a blow-job in the Oval Office – who cares?"

We need a new language of citizenship education; one grounded in the retelling of multiple stories, of suturing difference into the modernist narratives of state-centered discourse with its preoccupation with honest governance, rationalized institutions and the endless recirculation of "civics." In a world where the richest 500 people control the same amount of wealth as the poorest three billion, any representation of 'reason' seems absurd to many young people (*Utne Reader*, July-August, 1999, p. 55). Most texts stand in stark contrast to what youngsters see around them. Just who are we kidding when we talk about the rationalism of *due process* and state *political systems*?

- The leaders of the industrial world talk a lot about environmental responsibility but when Austria tried to limit the importation of rainforest timber it was slapped with penalties by GATT (New Internationalist, Jan./Feb. 1997, p.7).
- According to the United Nations, the amount of capital moving around the world illegally today (through secret bank transactions, criminal organizations, and rogue traders) is $750 billion annually. This is twice the total of foreign trade by all multinationals. The report concludes that agencies such as the World Bank have lost

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[11] The theme of new enfleshed meanings is further discussed in Chapter 9.

any semblance of real understanding or regulatory control over the international economy (New Internationalist, Nov. 1997, pp. 14-16).

- I teach in a province that is one of the richest in Canada, but worships the gods of the bottom line. A province where 21% of children live below the poverty line and one-quarter of Edmonton's children rely on the food bank.
- While the U.S. spent $3.7 billion annually during the last years of the Cold War, its annual expenditure on nuclear weapons will reach $4.5 billion by 2008 (Natural Resources Defense Council, Washington). For 1% of the world's annual military expenditure we could put every child on the planet in school. This $6 billion is apparently more than we can afford.

The strict realism of the modernist discourse of liberal humanism fails to contain the paradoxes of the world for our students. As an alternative, I ask us to consider Levinas' (1987) reminder that freedom is an antecedent to "an obligation to the other." Our freedom is measured by the emotional content we bring in our bond to the other, "to the very particularity of the obligation to the other" (p. 56). From Levinas, we need to encourage in our students an "affirmation of the radical interdependence of being that flows from our responsibility to the other," one that is not classically universal (as in liberal humanism), but one that harkens back to a pre-modern sense of the particular, the intransigence we encounter in the difficulties of what Barber (1995) calls the places of our "common living" (the home, street, marketplace).

The *Oxford English Dictionary* reminds that in the twelfth century loyalty referred to "a true obligation—duty and love, or being in the condition of plighted troth." Truth, I discovered was the "truth" we discover only in the relation with the other. We cannot find truth by ourselves in the individual. Truth grows from working with the other in troth. So in its earliest forms, loyalty was about discovering *troth* – one's predicament yields what is worthy, what is worthy of our giving to the other. As Hobbes in the seventeenth century wrote about loyalty to the object (the Leviathan) – modernity finds us committed to an object: the nation-state. Today as state-centered discourse remains the

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[12] The relationship between signifiers and their 'truth effects' is developed in the next chapter. Bracher's work informs much of what is elaborated here and in the discussion that will follow.

discourse of the Master. Civic responsibility has erased the relational, the *troth* of personal duty and love. We need to live the messiness of the call and the particularity of the other. Studying "government" in social studies increasingly means that we are left with the dominant educational metaphor of the single student hunched over a book or a multiple-choice exam.

The Gift of Failure

Jason lives in an apprehended space at our school. There is a sufficiency in his life but he knows he can "never win." For Sandra, her "givenness" is the category "women." For Sandra it is her big breasts that create her anxious solitude. It is fitting that at the end of the millennium in North America the number of women having breast augmentation equals the number having breast reduction. For women, their abjection is now a double: either being too small or too big. The gaze of male students is a source of abjection – a form of a "little death." Sandra says, "I don't know why I do it, sometimes I want to disappear." For Sandra the singularity of her call is from a point she cannot determine.

For both Jason and Sandra, being a student leader remains a signifier of possibilities, phantoms and ghosts of what we were and what we become. In the end, it is a source of their plighted troth. They do not pretend to "overcome," to win or to accomplish much except to live in the inaccessibility of their "sheer lack of being." Their truth is an agonal dread at times, but it is a way to configure their sense of *citizenship*.

Subjectivity is the interaction of a network of nodes of incommesurabilities that we apprehend as deferred, "fashioned, and delivered again, elsewhere, and elsewhen" (Wark, 1994, p. 162). Wark describes the phenomenological predicament this brings to *Dasein – being* that is thrown into the world. Throwness without caring for *Being* and attending to our Dread, can create a sense of inhabiting an unfathomable and incommensurable nowhere: "We are exposed to the world; the world no longer exposes itself to us" (p. 162). The vigour with which Sandra polices herself while poaching Descartes gestures towards a sense of the self that acts as both subject and object that is irreducible to presence or presentation (Derrida, 1995, p. 65). Sandra's self-effacement is the work of "giving death," of a sacrifice that suspends the self in the other and works the negation (of the self) as a form of affirmation (p. 66).

In Heidegger's sense, the world has become a picture and as such man has become a *subject who dreads* in the midst of objects that threaten to sweep him away in "a preoccupation with control, manipulation, and power" (as cited in Caputo, 1987, p. 233). The world no longer appears as a coherent place, yet students are continually called forth (Thrown) into the cold invocation of "getting it together" and "becoming yourself." I share the students' sense of ambivalence towards state-centered discourses in a world that circulates a monstrous, outrageous economy of the self that makes so many paradoxes. Consider Jason's ironic comment during the school 30 hour famine:

> Working on the 30 hour famine to raise money for African relief really reminded me how awful things are in Rwanda. I didn't mind going without food though. I guess going hungry isn't what it used to be.

Jason's puzzlement evokes the sense of living in an excess of meanings. As Derrida asks:

> The question of the self: who am I? Not in the sense of who am I, but who is this I? That can say who? What is the I, and what becomes or responsibility once the identity of the I trembles in secret (p. 92)?

The body is the site where "the individual meets the social" (p. 58). As with Sandra's impossibility of "women having big tits and a small ass," each body lives in the foreclosures and (im)possibilities of the Symbolic.

Living in the Gaze through *Plighted Troth*

Derrida argues that without the confidence that force gives us, we are left with the spectre of *being*. The mire of tensionalities that students live can be framed by appropriating Levinas' (1987) description of *being* as a "givenness", a horrible "haunting spectre" that is an ambiguity that lives below our (symbolic) consciousness that tries to run away from the "there is...the shadow of being."

For the three students being caught within the spectral economy of looks and gazes of popular culture acts as a source of apprehension and incitement. For Thomas, the strict economy of "fairness" and self-sacrifice forecloses his possibility and agency. For Sandra, her "givenness" is the category *women* conflated with her big breasts that look back at her as objects of abjection, carrying the gaze of male students; a 'givenness' she reads as a little death. Perhaps in saying, "I don't know why I do it, but I do put up with that crap." The singularity of her agency is from a point she cannot determine, but she does find it. For Jason, his failures are marked by being coded as a "loser" and marked as an abject other. He too acts within the difficulties that are given to him.

Dolar (1994) writes that consciousness finds itself when it "turns away from words" and the subject passes in the "impossible, 'real' Word which is always lacking; yet the act does not succeed any better than the word, and its failure engenders a new dialectic" (p. 78). The passage into the impossible Thing, the obstacle that we can see around, is for Dolar a recognition that consciousness has at its source a sense in each our subjectivity dies a bit 'in-itself' in order for the phenomenological experience of the 'I' to continue on. By passing through the Thing, the subject becomes and shares community with others who share in the passages of loss and hope, fear and courage.[13]

The many little deaths are what Derrida (1995) frames as the possibility of knowing we can never negotiate what matters most. We always live in sacrifice, as did Sandra, living a breasted experience with its hopes and horrors, enchantments and disenfranchisements in the world. Theirs is a world whose public and private spaces bring both horror and possibility – simultaneously inviting and repelling; a Baudrillardian simulacrum of the carnival and the grotesque. For many females, the body can be read as a *pleasant horror,* a "sheer fact of being," an impossible object to oneself - *woman.* What is at stake for many females is the difficulty of living with that which is impersonal and given, "the rustling of *the there* is...*as horror*" as Levinas writes allegorically of Being. From this inaccessibility we sense our *lack*.

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[13] Dolar rejects any claim of universality of experience here, he is merely describing the relation of consciousness to the necessity that in order to survive itself it must continually perish in the face of the recognition that what is on the other side cannot be known until the subject turns itself over to the Thing. An example might be a child viewing a horror film, covering his/her eyes but peeking out 'just to catch a bit of a glimpse of what is out there'. A friend who deliberately paddled into an impossible hole on a big river confessed to us after almost drowning, "I just had to go there to see what is was like."

For Thomas, Sandra and Jason school is a source of abjection. Their *plighted troth* signals possibilities, phantoms and ghosts. There is no success, only resolute repetition. The gift of failure is recognition of their *plighted troth*. This experience is the agonal politics of living an *otherness* and *lack* that is a "sheer fact of being." There is in their *troth*, a sense of an agonal dread, a "givenness" of Being that is Levinas' allegorical equivalent of *the night*, the '*thrownness* into the world' that is a horrible pleasure for them. As Bronfen (1998) reads in Lacan, "castration involves coming to terms with what one is not; with a recognition of finitude and that something crucial is already lost – and irretrievably so" (p. 20).

As with Abraham, we are joined as witnesses to something we cannot fully attest to. In what will follow, I will argue from Dolar's (1994) reading of Lacan that commitment flows from the necessity of living the 'little deaths' of our subjectivity" (p. 81). Such a pedagogy requires an aesthetics and ethics of solutions and answers that can never rescue us from indeterminacy. To map out such a pedagogy I offer a narrative that engages subjectivity, movement and desire.[14] I assume a position as one whose subjectivity as a teacher is formed in the field of the Other, a world striated within an economy of desires and prohibitions that renders commitment as a radical and hopeful contingency.

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[14] I draw these three vectors from Pile and Thrift (1995), as a way to engage the phenomenal "modalities through which subjects come to place themselves into power-ridden, discursively constituted, practically limited, materially bounded identities" (p. 39).

Chapter 3

Turning 'A/Way' from Words

"Every story is a travel story" writes de Certeau (1984, p. 115-16). For de Certeau, narrative structures carry within them "a panoply of codes, ordered ways of proceeding and constraints" (p. 33). A central impulse of the psychoanalytic understanding of teaching and the teacher-student relationship is its insistence on raising questions about the nature and sources of identity and authority in the classroom. While questioning relations of identity is nothing new, certainly the psychoanalytic critique of the sources of the self within language is an important contribution. The psychoanalyst asks us to question how the individual comes into being in language. Coming into being in language is for psychoanalysis its "meta-theory of the impasse of modernity" that raises the nettlesome question: "why in spite of his liberation from the constraints of traditional authority, is the subject not free (Žižek, 1997, p. 86)?" Freedom and authority: mediating conflictual knowledge and experiences in the classroom is the subjective experience teachers universally share. Rhetorically we ask, how can one speculate on how teachers do their cultural work without asking how the teacher *looks at* and *is looked at* within the society? How can we conceptualize teaching practice without thinking about the ways that the teacher comes to identify and locate a self? What follows attempts a partial answer to these questions.

The Four Discourses of Cultural Criticism

For Lacan speech acts cannot be confused with discourse. When the subject talks s/he is acting upon the three registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic and the Real. To succeed at communicating something, a speech act must take up a joint effort with the other. Properly understood, a discourse is the joint intersubjective relation between sender and receiver that sustains communication. Each speech act, to have a chance at success, must assume the other's demand. Speech and demand need each other. As I write these lines I assuming an other that, like my self, draws on the field of signifiers that we share. I am (hopefully) drawing upon particular points of signification that meet your demand as a reader. These points of signfication that are drawn from culture and tradition constitute the field of the big Other. In Lacanian script the big Other is indicated by the letter *A* from the Latin "alter." When I speak I am functioning as the little 'a', an agent trying to get a hold of the master signifiers that button down meaning.

Like the students described earlier, we are forever caught in our inability to button down the signifier. Unlike codes that create stable one-to-one correspondences between sign and referent, the enigmatic quality of language is that it stubbornly resists transparency. Since language works with both the Symbolic and Imaginary dimensions, as speaking subjects we are continually confounded when we seek the truth with the other.

Consider the diagram below as a way to conceptualize how a New Right discourse such as "choice" and "freedom" works intersubjectively to produce communication.

Agent (with systematic knowledge) → Other (the receiving subject)
Truth (the hidden assumptions) Production (expectations)

The dominant position in this matrix is that of the agent.
Consider the growing calls for accountability and measurement of schools. The agency of the New Right in its pronouncements that schools ought to achieve essential learning outcomes that can be externally measured flows from the assumption that there is core knowledge that is universal and that it can transmitted in seamless ways. The claim to possess this core knowledge (S1) is the place from which the New Right speaks. Teachers are construed as the Other (the receiving subject) that is expected to get results.

For the New Right, there are a number of difficulties here of course. First the question of "what is worth knowing" is highly contested. Second, the means to achieve the goal of transmitting this knowledge is not unproblematic. Third, teachers are not empty receptacles; they do occasionally bite back, and point out the difficulties of increasing expectations on schools with declining resources.

The Discourse of the Master

The New Right's invocation to 'get more with less' fits nicely as an example of the discourse of the Master. The discourse of the Master holds itself as the bearer as ultimate meaning or connection to a transcendental signifier such as "freedom" or "choice." Of course these signifiers are void of any real universal content in the community since, as Lacan would remind us, these are means and not ends (as cited in Bracher, 1993, p. 61). By annexing all of the goals of schooling into the fantasm of "freedom" and "choice" the New Right seeks to link the methods of running a business with those of running a public service. The point is that we all can see that the Emperor of 'fast capitalism' has no clothes: that unbridled competition and choice are as void as the Master's invocations: "try harder, keep going, do it once more." The slave obeys and gives the master what he needs, an alibi to keep the system going. The growth of state-sponsored lotteries and gambling across North America last few years gestures to the discourse of the Master. Under the discourse of the Master we are continually prepared to be winners under the sign of "winning the big one." Indeed, the lottery is the perfect sinthome of "fast capitalism" – getting the most out with the least in.[1]

$$\frac{S1}{\$} \longrightarrow \frac{S2}{a}$$

S1: the master signifiers in any text that work to interpellate the subject
S2: the network or signifiers that build the relationship between the master signifiers such as *working hard*, *being diligent*. S2 presents what is expressed and repressed through the chain of significations
a: surplus enjoyment from the Real that is excluded and produced by the system of

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[1] "Modern masters no longer need to be masters of more than one kind of knowledge, as were philosophers of old. They need only be masters of property. Having has been equated with knowing" (Bracher, 1993, p. 141). Here Bracher differs from Lacan's reading of the capitalist who he sees as one who displays the discourse of the hysteric. To have does not solve the problem of being. There remains, always outside our grasp, the scopic drive that, like all drives, is a death drive. The (rich) Master offers the system of signifiers (competition, wealth, property) as opaque and self-evident (property rights are, after all, troped in the American Declaration of Independence). Often times the "fast capitalist" driven within the system of significations (S2) invokes the need to keep the system going no matter what the consequences, often forfeiting his/her own jouissance (Bracher, p. 144). The master will not admit his own castration, his forbidden jouissance. In late capitalism the slave needs the master in order to hide from his/her own jouissance, choosing instead to produce it for some one else. Seen within this frame, talk of tax concessions for major professional sports franchises is a logical imperative. As income tax rates for middle income earners continue to rise, corporations continue to see theirs fall. I "Giving others a tax break" is a variation of giving jouissance of the other.

knowledge
$: the divided subject, split between the identity to which it is interpellated

Using this diagrammatic representation, the signifiers of choice and competition are S1. What is produced and hidden within this discourse (S2) is the content of everyday living that results from these representations being put into practice. As the public is called forth to invest in the signifiers of choice and competition, the New Right seeks to ignore the damage done by fragmenting the public school system. In this relation the Master (S1) holds all the cards.

On a functional level the configuration looks like this:

Fast capitalists: hold the "secret to making it"	working hard, competition
workers: down but a chance at being 'up'	chance, financial hardship

The key point here is that the Master's function (S2), is to restrict the voice and desire of the worker/slave (a) whose circumstance represents a piece of the Real. I recall Frank Smith's (1995) admonition that one of the greatest sources of sadness for him in working with teachers is that they have been "taught that the system they work in is rational and functional – so that failure must be their own" (p. 590). We come into the Symbolic world tethered to our lack, and as we move into the strict realism of the everyday life we struggle to maintain an erect posture in the face of the Big Other (Žižek, 1992, p. 59). We do not fully "grasp" the empty rules we are given as we come into the world: they grasp us. I struggle here for a reading of Lacan's sense of the Phallus as a (pre)supposition that circulates within the acts of repetition.

The Discourse of the University

As we move into the next configuration, the master signifier (S1) is moved one quarter turn to the left, leaving it as a repressed element with S2 taking its place as the agent. S2 now must exert its function to express desire from the position of the agent. But since desire is the Other's desire, the discourse of the University feeds on the energies and ambitions of the young. To maintain its position of concealing S1 and of answering the demand of the student (a), the university must continually stage and upstage knowledge.

$$\frac{S2}{S1} \longrightarrow \frac{a}{\$}$$

In this configuration students are the receivers (a) - of the total systems knowledge (S2). The system (the university) represses the master signifier (S1). The invocation here is "you can never learn enough." The point being that the acquisition of credentials is configured as a way to get to S1, however, S1 remains elusive. An aggressive reading of Lacan here finds the root of the discourse of the University in the Cartesian ego: the "I" that is supposed to know. The aspirations of young university students as subjects who are supposed to know are underpinned by the master signifiers of the "I", the thoughtful, critically reflective subject who is trained as a disciplined thinker. The production of theses on poverty (as opposed to actually engaging social activism) is an example of the tendency of the discourse of the University to privilege the production of words over action. "Talking is to the university discourse as carrion is to the dog" (Lacan, 1991, p. 195).

Lacan's belief that the discourse of the University has taken increasing precedence over the discourse of the Master. Rather than investing in the function of the Master's blind agency (look at what I have to see what you want), we see an increasing saturation of the discourse of the university with its claims to possess knowledge and expert knowledge. "The truth" occupies the domain of S1, but since we cannot ever know the truth, S2 (the chain of significations) will get us as close as possible. Consider the infatuation with weather and the Weather Network, an increasingly popular channel on North American cable networks. Our demand is to know what will happen with the weather, but since we cannot ever really know, we are positioned by the weather network as (a) as the weather forecaster (S2) works across the matrix of significations: satellite maps, pressure gradients and so forth. The social formation that is contributing to the growth of the discourse of the University is paralleled by introduction of business schools on university campuses and the growth in MBA programs. Such programs claim to capture the vagaries of the market into comprehensible bits of information that will allow candidates to replicate the successes of wealthy entrepreneurs. But both the weather and the stock market are subject to the vagaries of the Real.

The Discourse of the Hysteric

The structure of the discourse of the Hysteric sees the preeminence of the divided subject $.

$$\frac{\$}{a} \longrightarrow \frac{S1}{S2}$$

By reclaiming that part of the subject left out by the master signifier (S1), we locate the discourse of the Hysteric. The refusal of the divided subject ($) to have one's body contained by the master signifiers is the hysterical structure where discourse is dominated by the speaker's symptom (Bracher, 1993, p. 66). The failure of the discourses of the University and the Master to contain teacher reports of stress and intensification of their work is evident in this teacher's anecdote:

> I had 34 students in my class with three high needs students, two of which are on medication. So when I mentioned to a central office person that this was difficult to manage he suggested I take a time management workshop. I got so upset - I just looked at him and it came out of me… "why don't you screw yourself you ass-hole." I was crying by the time the last words came out.

The teacher's failure to be polite and engage the central office person in a debate about the intensification of teachers' work gestures towards the need of the hysteric to have the other find the master signifier. The hysterical subject remains in solidarity with the master signifiers (Bracher, 1993, p. 67). The frustrated teacher is looking for a way to deal with the anxiety of an impossible teaching situation.

One reading of the difficulty here for the teacher is not that she can do without the solution offered by the central office person, but that she looked to him in the first place for a solution. The teacher needed to find new signifiers for herself and she did:

> I tell you that was the last straw. After that I realized how naïve I had been and decided the only way we could some help is to raise the political heat on the school board and the government.

The teacher's new found solidarity with the signifiers of political action can be read as a new discourse of the Master (i.e. *political action* directed at unseating certain people from office assuming that the power lies in the hands of these individuals). There is a need to continually question the re-insertion of new master signifiers that lay claim to our identities and desires. Specifically, we need to question ourselves about the manifest effects signifiers work on ourselves and each other.

The Discourse of the Analyst

Against the identity that the patient assumes (S1), the discourse of the Analyst is directed at releasing the excluded part of being (a). A successful analyst promotes separation from the Ideal Ego and psychic connection to S1 by eliciting a hysterical structure where anxiety and emptiness dominate (Bracher, 1993, p. 71). To get the patient to the traverse the fantasy connections with object of the other is to get the patient to recognize the deficiencies in the Other, the incompleteness of the Other imagined as whole. The patient's construal of an Ideal Ego (an other that does lack), is the psychic bond that must be broken if the jouissance of the patient is to be permitted to be grounded with new signifiers.

There is a two-fold process in analysis: one of separation and re-identification.

$$\frac{a}{S2} \longrightarrow \frac{\$}{S1}$$

In the discourse of the analyst, agency emerges in the analysand's project of seeking help: of trying to come to terms with a part of life that is unfulfilling. The bringing forth of *what is forbidden* (S2) is impelled by the desire for jouissance (a), yet until S1 can be unlocked the patient remains stuck. Typically patients enter analysis drawing on the discourse of the University, seeking to attach meanings to a manner of casual factors in their life histories. Yet is the job of the analyst to recognize these efforts as essentially narcissistic: an effort by the analysand to re-connect with an Ideal Ego. To look for causes of one's fall is to look from the desire of the other. " I would have been better in school if only…" might be one such manifestation of this searching for an alternative Ideal Ego to surreptitiously re-attach to. The analysand demand for reinscription into a new Ideal Ego must be continually refracted in order to expose the underlying fantasy that we remain barred from the (a), we demand the signifiers of desire (a) but we cannot possess (a).

Mapping Out A Journey

I appropriate from Bracher (1993) the questions that follow as a series of guideposts organized around each of Lacan's three psychic registers: the Symbolic, the Imaginary, and the Real. These questions inform the four action research sites/sights I review in Chapters 4-7. Chapter 8 will attempt to address these questions directly by mapping out possibilities for teacher commitment informed by a psychoanalytic cultural critique.

Symbolic Register

1. As teachers, what power is the Ideal Ego (the invocation to perform) holding over us as we work under representations of teaching that undermine our own efficacy and desires?
2. Do the master signifiers we employ as teachers affirm or deny the desires of the other? (Are the signifiers we deploy ones that occlude the possibility of our students investing in their own master signifiers?)

Imaginary Register

1. What images/hopes/fears are recognized and valorized by the signifiers used in our teaching?
2. What desires are evoked by the imagery of the discourse?

Real Register

1. Whose desires are being privileged and whose are being repressed?
2. Is the other's lack being ignored or acknowledged?

These questions are not intended as a way to create a scorecard of winners and losers in the game of cultural criticism. Rather, they are intended as a way to read the sub-text of the four sites/sights of action research that follow. In taking up these questions in the four sites/sights of action research I recognize the (im)possibilities of exposure of the powerful forces at work within the psychic economy of teaching. The chapters that follow visit the above questions as a way to work through: *knowledge/beliefs* (S2), *ideals* (S1), *want-of-being* ($) and *forbidden jouissance* (a). Again, the intent is not to answer these questions in a strict economy of psychic ‘winners and losers’, but to treat these questions as sources of inquiry that informs the narrative.

Chapter 4

Impaired Driving

If everything is seen from a place, from where specifically does the subject speak? As Pile and Thrift (1995) suggest, any attempt to map ourselves as speaking subjects is caught up in the triangulation of 1) the desire of wanting to know, 2) not knowing and 3) not wanting to know (p. 59). Within this trinity, action research is informed by psychoanalysis, as a project that speaks from within the etymology of distance: from Latin, *distare*, "to stare from one's place standing apart."

Is it true, as critics claim, that at best postmodernism is nothing more than "ideological mystification" that leads the subject to believe that there is no reason for hope, no place to be committed within a simulacrum that is a world of "false appearances all the way down" (Norris, 1990, p. 25)? From Lacan, I draw the sentiment that my commitment can only come as an interpretation from the Real. In what follows I illustrate how the master signifiers of *professional conduct* and *due process* acted to legitimate the blind reason of a school board that decided to terminate a teacher's contract. Further, I will illustrate how these same signifiers became a vehicle for me to continue to repress my own desires and subsequently foreclose my jouissance.

I present the narrative acknowledging that psychoanalytic theory is susceptible to becoming a discourse of the Master (Bracher, 1993, p. 61). As the story unfolds therefore, I put to use the Lacanian master signifiers to 'work on my own desires': a way to achieve change and enhance the aesthetics and ethics of teaching practice.[1]

My commitments as a teacher are enfleshed in the impossible balance that live as the traumatic (im)pacts of a body that "persistently wanders, as a foreign body, through the psychic and somatic systems (Bronfen, 1998, p. 21). For Shotter (1993), "to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life" (p. 232). What follows is a form of story-telling that gestures towards the psychoanalytic project of refracting the subjectivity that is momentarily (dis)played in my ego's identifications. It is an imagining that stands apart as a representationality, *a form of life,* that momentarily tries to stare back at the places from which it speaks.

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[1] Bracher emphasizes the need to see psychoanalysis within the project of cultural critique, as a means not an end (1993, p. 61).

In an eight month period over the winter of 1995, I commuted once a week from a small town in western Canada to university. The three hour drive each way allowed me to take classes at the university and teach part-time at the high school where I had taught for twenty years. That 600 kilometer stretch of highway I travelled on each week became part of the *topos*, the surface, on which my subjectivity (was) re-surfaced. As I think about writing and doing research, I lived the difficulties of the split lives I pursued. My car increasingly become my textual friend in living this split.

When Shotter (1993) talks about having "a car mechanic's" attitude towards language, I found a dialogue that spoke to my own perplexities (p. 203). In a way, my form of life has found an enacted language in which to speak. I share Shotter's trope of the car mechanic's understanding of the automobile and my sense of driving as an *opening,* a hinge to engage an understanding of change within the rubric of action research. I draw on Shotter's four registers of the "car mechanic's attitude to language" in relation to my own conflicting demands. A fabulia[2] on the road of change in my life:

> Laurie is a 31 year old Physical Education teacher at our school. For seven years I have been working with her in a school of 40 teachers. Last June she was terminated by our school board for "unprofessional conduct." The charges made against her included allegations that she was inappropriately supervised a class back-country trip and that she had spent the night in a tent with a male student.[3] Despite her excellent teacher record the school board proceeded to terminate her contract. Like many on our staff, I rallied around Laurie, hoping that letters of support at the Board hearing would save her job. We hoped other less severe disciplinary action might be taken. But how far could we go in supporting her? Since the details of the charges against her were not made public, teachers on our staff who chose to give support to Laurie were caught in a mire - how does a professional respond to a colleague whose situation defies the gaze of professional rational visibility? We were assured by the our professional association that "due process" would take its course. Yet as the rumours spread around the town, we all

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[2] A fabulia is a narrative that combines both actual and fictive descriptions.

[3] After an investigation by a Board of Reference it was determined that were no foundations for the charges against her and that she should be fully re-instated.

> saw the obvious coming: her reputation would be dragged through the mud. Even more difficult for me, was my secret infatuation with Laurie - one that I shared only once with a close friend.

Shotter's four registers of a car mechanic's attitude to language follow as a transection of my experience with Laurie's difficult situation.

1. Knowing how the saying of *something* "works."

Something is happening when we are engaged in a change in our lives. The choices we make in the representational practices we use does make a difference that matters. As in driving, every nuance - holding the wheel, every minute decision makes a difference that throws us further into the world. It is, perhaps in Heidegger's sense of "language being the house of being," that I recall the confusion I felt trying to decide to 'drive' through the difficulties presented by Laurie's termination. Resignation to her situation would be confronted with anger and a desire to speak up for her more forcefully. I can recall now my hidden embarrassment crawling around my brain as I deliberated challenging Board officials over their decision to move for her termination. I lived, as Shotter, would suggest, in a world of possible responses (p. 147), but caught in the intransigence of words that could not live in the world. I dared not speak any more forcefully on her behalf – I was afraid of being 'found out'. I decided, like many other teachers to let 'the system' deal with the charges against her. While Laurie was eventually vindicated, over a year passed and by then the small community was rife with gossip and innuendo.

My decision to hide behind the letter of the law haunts me today. So too does the discovery of new 'I', the stranger I did not recognize in myself: the person that was full of fear to claim a double demand he could not fulfill (to stand up for what was right and to let Laurie know how I felt about her). That 'other' other to myself remains an abjection that I keep at a distance.

> I am but the effect of a folding, a suture that will not resist for long the passages' forces; impossible to bridge the soul; the infraction is severe (Daignault, 1992, p. 197).

Is this what Bakhtin (1986) means when he claims that one always finds oneself animated by a complex of urges and cravings? Yet it is in these moments that we can find the "supra *I*," the "witness and the judge of the whole human being, of the whole *I*, and consequently someone who is no longer the person, no longer the *I*, but the *other*" (p. 137). I remain *the other as a severe infraction*.

Often, on the Thursday nights that I routinely drove home, I remained alone, driving my car, thinking about Laurie and my betrayal of her and my own failed jouissance. I remain scarred by these events. I remain invested in the signifiers of "due process" but recognize the obscene supplement that became the reality for Laurie.[4]

Due process remains a rock that I can hide under. As I drive alone at night, I am distanced by the hybrid of the textual locations I inhabit: father- teacher-husband-student. I am both *driving* and *being driven*: a body that comes to materialization through the act of repetition (Butler, 1993)[5]. In the specular regime of Lyotard's (1992) postmodernism, all animals are black at night. So too, I would claim, are the human ones. As I look into the night as I drive the three hours it takes to get home, spectres remain in the ditches on the margins of the highway. I think Lacan was right: as the tears roll down my cheeks as I think about Laurie, I realize that even my own clever discourses cannot contain themselves and their contradictions. The Real remains as the absent cause, laying simultaneously behind the reach of my car's headlights and behind my desire to see what is ahead.

2. How practically an "utterance" goes.

Experience is a structure built by the text(s) of our stances taken in the world. These experiences, sometimes recalled in our representational capacities as the stories we tell, make their own way into the future of our lives. Our stories become the repetitions that inform our consciousness - that becomes itself the house of further repetitions. I am caught by how language goes, "by the indefinite referral of signifier to signified (that yields), a certain pure and infinite equivocality which gives signified meaning no respite, no rest - it always signifies again and differs" (Derrida, 1978, p. 58). A car does *go*, and so does our speech and attempts to represent our experiences in the world.

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[4] Laurie was cleared of all charges and fully vindicated. Those individuals on the Board who pursued her with such vigour were never compelled to issue a public apology or a public announcement of the appeal hearing. In the eyes of some in the community Laurie's guilt/innocence remains an ambiguity. The net effect for Laurie is that she was construed as 'guilty before the fact.'

[5] In *Bodies that Matter* Butler calls for a return to a conceptualization of *matter* not as fixed sites or surfaces, but through "a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter" (p. 9).

Laurie was a close friend who - as one who I desired and one who is inaccessible. I lived many little deaths through her. On the day of her termination I found her crying in her office. I could not admit to her that I wanted to hug and comfort her. I agonized over *maintaining the right distance*. I was unable to speak or move in the spaces I imagined as a professional and a friend who cared in ways that were unspeakable. The erasure of *eros*, as hooks (1994) reminds me, is one of the occlusions of professional discourse production. As a teacher, I would have to accept the decision of the administration to fire her, but within the "conceptual orderings of subjectivities" (Britzman, 1991, p. 57). So I *spoke* the *speech* that distanced the conditions that would have made by future life at the school impossible.

3. What *drives* the utterance?

This is probably the most important question for me. Without a poststructuralist reading of action research, we cannot understand that which drives our questions and powers the engine of language. Action research can draw from Butler (1993), the understanding that language acts to 'cite' power formations on the body (p. 17). The body is a thus a site/cite formation that gains its contours through its passages through the specular economy of the social world. This materialization is a kind of citationality, a power that works in the formation of the "I". For Laurie who endured the stigma of being put under a cloud of suspicion, certainly the local rumour mongering acted as Butler (1993) would imply, as a form of power that acts not because there is any inherent power in the words themselves, but rather in their continual reiteration and persistence (p. 9).

There are collisions and difficulties in action research, as in driving, when the our practices (informed by the engine of language), fail to meet the difficulties of the world. I did not have any way to speak about my feelings for Laurie; I chose instead to stay hidden at night in my car during my long trips home every week. The night has become my best friend. Shotter's call for a "critical tool-making" is a problem for me - I cannot afford the risk of stopping my car along the road trying to fix it - I would get sideswiped by the demands of everyday life. Standing still is not an option when we are caught in the flux and incommensurabilities of living.

Like language, cars get stalled in the strict realism of a frozen winter's night. Anyone who knows the fear of hearing a car begin to falter knows the power of the interruption, the end of what was to be a different journey. What drives the utterance in action research (or any reflective narrative of change) is the curiosity we have as agents about how to keep going. This is why I appreciate Gauthier's (1992) sense that action researchers should not stew about what action research *is*, but concern themselves with what action research *can do*. I do not care about why my car runs...I know that it does. It is in the breakdowns that I discover both its limitations and my own.

4. What does the utterance *do* ?

As Spivak (1994) reminds me, to talk of an experience (in this case *change*), is " to make visible the assignment of subject positions" (p. 19-64). Utterances are claims we make about our resistance and complicitousness in relation to the identities and positions that the world locates for us. My utterances, as effects of the stain of the Real,[6] remain representations, the perplexities I call my commitments. These commitments, invested in through my *lack*, are the *misrecognitions* that live among the objects in my phenomenal world. But the misrecognitions are the "I" that constitutes my surveillance of my incompleteness. In driving at night I am often reminded of Levinas' (1989) sense of the "*out thereness*" of the world (p. 31); of the other behind the glaring headlights, and of the spectres that might be lurking at the side of the road. Driving at night calls me to what I would call a *precipitous representationality*, going into the *there-isness* with a look that is only ever sufficient for the moment and the tools at hand.

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[6] The Real is in Lacan's sense is the unrepresentable touch, an inassimilable sense of a thing in-itself. Read another way, the Real is an object of anxiety that offers no possible negotiation. The effect of the Real is rational (I fall if I junp off of a cliff) and the real is rational. But the Real is not reality in the strict sense that it cannot be assimilated by the Symbolic.

Then it happens. A deer jumps out in front of the car. At first I see it and don't respond. "A deer," I think to myself. Then, as if taking over from seeing, my foot slams on the brake. Luckily the deer lunges out of harm's way – I am hopelessly unable to slow down as the deer darts off into the woods. As an approaching car comes into view I flick my lights in as cautionary warning to a fellow traveler. A desperate gesture of solidarity to an other who travels in the night like I? I try to make sense of the moment, my heart racing, my mind slowly realizing that death was a fleeting moment away.

While driving at night, Reason and the master signifiers of *caution* and *driving carefully* recede in the face of the *a*. The appearance of Laurie, like the deer that lunged out in front of me that night, stands as a little piece of the Real (a). Strangers always bring news.

There is only so much reason can do in "the Night of the World" (Žižek, 1992, p. 46). There are no ontological certainties driving at 100 km/h at night - there is only going forward into the adequacy of the moment. In dealing with Laurie's situation, I remained far enough from my demand to do the right thing. I lived, and still do remain under the discourse of the Master, complicit in defending the "due process" and "the legal system."

"You write about yourself from your own height. You don't stand on stilts or on a ladder but on your own bare feet" (Wittengstein as cited in Szaabados, 1992, p. 33). This is advice I remember when driving and writing. I have always felt that action research is a way of marking out the traces left over when I have reflected in my journal about the day's events or an encounter I have had. These occasions of conflicting demands represent the nexus between the inside/outside binary that I find my own subjectivity caught in. Autobiographical writing after Wittengstein reminds us that "a truth cannot dispel the fog."

Driving as a "crash body" in the aesthetic machine is being aware of *living the hinge*, of being both open/closed and inside/outside. We are imbricated in between the maw of the unspeakable Real, and the strict realism of the registers of the Symbolic.[7]

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[7] I call upon here Arthur Kroker's sense of "crash bodies" in the sensorium that (im)pacts our lives – caught up, as we are, in an "aesthetic machine" (1994, 151). Doing action research in ways that gesture towards the psychic and somatic systems that work on our bodies, has the advantage of inscribing human agency in a

Action research in the aesthetics of "crash bodies" is as Gauthier (1995) claims of action research, is a "weak theory." But good night driving relies on weak theory.

We are given the gift of death, as Derrida (1995) suggests, to allow us the opportunity to understand the breach of the inside/outside, the living/not living. From lost hope we can draw the mindfulness of what life gives and takes away. I have confronted this reality with the suicide of my mother thirty years ago and the death of my brother in a bizarre accident when he was eleven years old. The memories of these losses

> Outside and inside are both intimate – they are always ready to be reversed, to exchange their hostility. If there exists a border-line between such an inside and outside, this surface is painful on both sides (Bachelard, 1964: 217-218).

I still go on as a "crash body," living the demands, desires, and disappointments that bring me temporarily home.

Laurie is still out there. So am I.
Laurie is inside of me. So am I.
Out there, always, part of me remains.

Bronfen (1998) reminds me that working the traumatic wounds of our own vulnerabilities is a central project the action research I have taken up here. This involves the "ethical stance to assume fully the impossible task of symbolizing the Real, inclusive of its necessary failure" (Žižek, 1994, p. 200). Within my subjectivity inhabit the antinomies of the discourses of the Analyst and the University that make it possible for me to bear witness to my own fatal attractions.[8] The sublime beauty of the Imaginary is that it (em)braces what the Symbolic abhors: contradiction. Like Jekyl I admit to my own capacity to be both the knife and the wound.

Lacan uses a non-linear enfolded *topos*, the Moebius strip, to illustrate the synchrony that occurs as *objet a* becomes a shadow among other objects in the

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virtual aesthetic, as "a hinge between the minor language of the possible and the majoritarian language of the present" (152).

[8] The four discourses of the Master, University, Hysteric, and Analyst are best imagined as existing in a non-liner relation such as Moebius Strip. Such a configuration allows us to see how the University can draw on the bureaucratic discourse of the Master when it meets the demands of those in institutional positions of power.

world.[9]

I call forward some shadows from my world. I came from a family of six kids - my mother married when she was 16 because she was pregnant with me. She had six children by the time she was 26. Good Catholic girl. Isolated by a medical profession that over-medicated her, she suffered numerous nervous breakdowns. My mother committed suicide when I was eleven. Was her act the pathological impulse that refused the "betrayal" of appealing to some kind of master signifier like God or Family (Žižek, 1994, p. 68)? Maybe she shirked her Duty to her Children by dropping out - but I always carried on, wanting to be the good boy. After she died I can remember people asking me if I was mad at her for deserting us kids. I can recall the school's guidance counselor probing me with this question several times. I had no idea what he was talking about but gradually came around to saying that I was angry with her just so the counselor would leave me alone. After that he helped me "work through my anger" by telling me she felt trapped and so on... as if I needed him to explain what my mother was going through. Even after her death the Super Ego hunted her down and, as with Thomas, became for her an inaccessible truth.

Can I ever get closer to Thomas's sacrifice – to my mother's? To my own desire to write the troth of my commitment to teaching? The ego does not give up its prerogatives easily (Canning, 1994).[10]

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[9] Chaos theory (non-linear dynamics) might model *objet a* as a "strong attractor", a coherence that generates repetitions (compulsions) that give rise to patterns (the subject is determined by the signifier but is able to emerge through *aphanisis* - confrontation with the uncanny)? In this regard, the narrative of Christ's sacrifice (suicide) and subsequent re-birth acts for believers as an inverted "law run amok" - the Superego imperative that prohibits Christians from taking their own lives (Žižek, 1994, p. 67). I can remember as a Catholic boy feeling the guilt that was the "superego imperative" Žižek speaks about. In fact, I wonder if that is why I ended up being such a good student in elementary school and then a teacher who burns himself out for students. Always wanting to be the good boy.

[10] One day last month in a washroom cubicle I noticed someone had scribbled, "The University of Alberta is a mother-fucker." Maybe, I too, have violated the memory of my mother by reconstituting this story within the discourse of the University. If Lacan is correct and the tomb was the first sign, then perhaps my mother's stands as another sign of a 'little death' as I suture her story into the master signifiers of the University's discourse. Maybe I'll write anything to suckle at the teat of the university? An entry from my journal: *What fantasies will wait in the hall during my upcoming candidacy? Is mine to become the knife and the wound? Being sufficiently vulnerable and articulate. Stammer but don't stumble, explain but don't confuse.*

Chapter 5

Places in Teaching Women's Studies

Any place I would save for myself is one for which I am answerable
to the other. *Llewelyn* (1995, p. 65)[1]

Why do you ask us so many questions about what we think about our
tits and asses – don't you have a life? Gina (a student with a life)

Do the master signifiers I employ as a male teacher in a women's studies class work to deny the desire of students? How does a women's studies class act to deploy the discourse of the University? In what ways are resistances by students instances of what Žižek calls for: opening up the "plurality of the Phallus"?[2] In what follows I take up Levinas' claim that ethical practice emerges when theory is side-stepped for particular responsibility to the other's predicament.[3]

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[1] Drawn from a discussion of Levinas' fundamental ethics.

[2] I draw from Žižek here his argument that the there is huge misunderstanding as to the role of *suture*, the *gaze* and the *Phallus* in the Lacanian psychic economy. For Žižek, the suture and the gaze should not construed as "bad things" that foreclose meaning. Rather, as in the case of the suture, the phallic signifier opens and closes the sites/sights of meaning. Drawing on the Hegelian dialectic, the signifier *nation* acts to supplant traditional societies while creating possibilities for new psychic investments. While *nation* might de-suture traditional societies, it can act to find a new central point for psychic investment (Žižek, 1996, as cited in Osborne, 1996, p. 27). Consider the example of Canada's dispersed indigenous tribal groupings taking up the signifier *First Nations* as a marker of solidarity and coherence in order to negotiate within the master signifiers of the Canadian government claiming to act as representatives for the *Canadian people* and the *state*. The gaze is also misunderstood within Foucault's image of the panopticon where, as in the male gaze the woman is reduced to an object. For Lacan, the gaze is the object, it is the gaze that carries the Phallus. In this economy, no one holds the Phallus: neither man nor woman. A further illustration of the Phallus as an empty signifier that no one holds is an example given by Žižek (1997). An ordinary person in 'real life' might be corrupt and vile, but upon wearing a robe is deemed to possess the symbolic mandate of the big Other (p. 150). The judges' insignia becomes "the point apropos of the Phallus as the signifier" of institutional logic. The trick for the judge is that s/he sustain the place of the signifier by balancing the look and the gaze. The judge cannot act like ordinary people (thus the insignia, the high chair behind the bench) nor can s/he act too much like "a judge" by simply quoting legal precedent (the discourse of the Master) without nodding to the circumstance of the Real. Such a judge soon loses credibility in a liberal democracy that expect the law (*lex*) to be balanced by justice (*jus*).

[3] This ethical relation is particularly vexing for a heterosexual male teacher like myself since any erotic relation reduces the self to *a self*, falling short of meeting the difference in the other. Of course such a claim is highly contested. See hooks (1994) for an exploration of this debate in teaching. My next chapter takes up the antinomy of the teacher as a *desiring subject/subject of desire*.

My interest in women's studies involves my work as an instructor in a third year university course in 1996 in a small community college in western Canada. I begin from my position as a middle-aged male, interrogating the panic media that frantically represents a narrowly defined range of acceptable female body types. I came to women's studies first through my interest as a high school social studies teacher who saw gender issues and sexual identity questions all but ignored in the curriculum. My graduate work led to the completion of a project that identified teaching practices and strategies that would open up questions of *whose knowledge counts as knowledge*?, and *what counts as political discourse*?[4]

In our classroom I hoped there would not be subject positions unproblematically taken up as saints/sinners, confessors/inquisitors, enemies/friends – I sought only the traces of Butler's (1993) claim that we come to subjectivity through the verifications and injuries that we live through (p. 29). Butler's sense of the performative, of the process of reiteration by which *subjects* and *acts* appear in unison (p. 9), called me as a teacher, but with reservations. The most obvious of these was that, as master signifiers of the discourse of the University, Butler's call for a critical reflection of the re-materialization of subjectivity were, themselves, reflections of an effect of the unconscious helped constitute my Ideal Ego.[5]

Within my Ideal Ego, I wanted to imagine I worked in a place where students would give up their written work, their posters and music as artifacts of their desires and identifications. From the bricolage that would come to be our class, I struggled to do the cultural work that Caputo (1987) frames as living the forms of life that do not themselves limit the forms of life they are supposed to house (p. 263).

The course was entitled "Introduction to Postmodernism and Feminism." I developed a variety of assignments to explore the issues surrounding media and body image. The assignments I designed for the students (under the master signifiers such as a review of postmodernism and feminism) were in many ways positioned within the scopic regime of a male middle-aged teacher inquiring about their investments in media portrayals of the female body in popular culture. The discourse of the University troped through my course outline and into our classroom had the initial effect, I sensed, as positioning the students as being *in error* – requiring the corrective of a curriculum that invites them to critically inquire into their self-identities and lifestyles.

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[4] See Couture, J-C. (1994). *Saturating Politics*. Unpublished thesis. University of Alberta.

I recall one student's question early in the class on personal reflections on popular images of the ideal body. Half-joking she asked about my preoccupation with "tits and asses," and asked "Don't you have a life?" While we laughed, the tension this question created was palpable. Such a question was, for me gestured, a *tyche*, a touch from the Real. For me the question constituted the gaze, the object of my desire looking back at me. Had the student named "the condition of possibility" that made teaching what it is? [6]

In what follows I will explore an ethical frame for my encounters with the 19 students in the class within l*iving in between tension and intention*, as a gesture drawn from Levinas'(1984) sense of the radical 'givenness' of existence. For Levinas, there is the ambiguity and indeterminateness of what consciousness must give all of us: a phenomenological sense of "the givenness of the world that is neither exterior nor interior" (Hand, 1989, p. 31). The antinomy of exterior/interior shapes our Being. For Levinas, consciousness is formed by the giving way to the other, by assuming the rupture between myself and the face of the Other.[7] While Levinas rejects psychoanalytic frames of reference, he does arrive at a similar point as Lacan does in his argument that the Other continually solicits us as an object that calls for recognition. The Other, as Levinas writes, is the apprehension that causes a split or rupture in the self. Such a splitting is a necessity for the self to become what it is ethically called to be: a recognition of the plentitude of difference in the Other. The self, for Levinas, must escape singularity. In rejecting transcendence and ontology, Levinas calls us to engage a piece of *autrui* (what is absolutely other in the Other). Levinas rejects idealism and any search for the order of the Same.

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[5] I draw here from Rajchman (1995, 16-17) that interrogating one's style involves identifying those relations that form our Ideal Ego.

[6] Žižek (1996a) illustrates the how the question may have gestured at *objet petit a*, an object that "is external to the endless series of empirical objects" that are my demand.

[7] For Levinas, the human face is always a by itselfness that acts as a rejection of any totalizing system of recognition (Lechte, 1994, p. 117).

What Levinas finds in language is the possibility to break from the potentially totalizing effects of representation. He sees the signifier as never having a complete presence. Levinas sees the possibility of the other speaking to me as a sign that I live in difference. Language, the doorway to Other, is the opening of an infinitude of possibilities around which my self is formed. Thus for Levinas, the Other, the existence of alterity (language as alterity, God as alterity), allows us to bypass transcendence and other systems of the same. Epistemology and Reason must heed the face of the Other. For Levinas, we are ethically called to confront alterity in its "nudity."[8]

Sucking Up/Spitting Out Bodies

An early example of my castration working in the discourse of the University was in our class discussion of a project called "Photo Documentary" where students examined images of female bodies. One student, Lori, did an thorough job, identifying various poses in popular magazine advertisements (e.g. "the body to die for") that exemplified concepts from the course. The exhaustiveness the Lori's collection and analysis of the ads indicated a studied dedication and diligence to the task assigned. I remarked that this was "excellent work" and complimented Lori on the quality of the submission. Yet when I asked her to explain how these ads affected her, she simply said, "Not much; I don't read these magazines anyway." When I raised the fact that others do, Lori simply remarked, "These are just pictures – people know the difference. Besides, why should it matter to me if some women are so stupid they get sucked into this stuff?"

The inquiry (Foucault would say a *policing*) of students' capacities to engage media is propelled by our institutional incitation and invitation to examine students' proficiencies as cultural readers and agents. Their capacity to be 'self-aware' as to how cultural icons imbricate their own subjectivity has the ironic effect of constructing them as unitary subjects (in the classic tradition of liberal humanism), who agentically act upon, and within, cultural forms.[9]

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[8] A favorite term for Levinas. The Other is stripped bare before us and as a result the face of difference is the authority we are called to answer.

Transect
Our words police the streets
that our bodies cruise on.

Of course whether or not critical pedagogy that invigorates new forms of cultural politics is possible is a debate that has taken place in other forums. Giroux, Lankshear, McLaren and Peters (1996) take up this project with enthusiasm, as does Kellner (1995) and others.[10] As I indicated earlier, I find it useful to pursue Butler's (1993) sense of *the body that matters* over the repetitions of materializing effects within the Symbolic and Imaginary. For me subjectivity is a sedimentation, a *topos* of fissures and gaps that stabilize and shift over time as the tectonic morphology of the unconscious concedes and asserts itself in the construction of our lives. In Butler's sense, of sedimentation as "materialization" she sees performativity being "rethought as citationality and resignification" (p. 21). As what is disallowed enters the unconscious, the regulatory ideal of "sex" that attempts a differentiation of *bodies*, produces exclusions and repressions that are crucial to understand. "Power works through the foreclosure of its effects" and we need to examine how what has been occluded might be "produced as a troubling return" (p. 23). From Butler, I have sought in my work to assist in the "troubling return" – the disruption of the Phallus as it circulates through the Symbolic.

The coding of the language of reading culture "critically" (S2) serves to mark students as agents that can interrogate the very symbolic regimes that they are constituted through. Yet, they are continually denied access to 'the truth' (S1). In the assignment the students were expected to *reveal* the *hidden* "influences" that have formed their "understanding of sexuality and body image." There is, within the master signifiers embedded in the introduction to the various assignments, an Enlightenment coding of

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[9] I am reminded here of Fiske's claim that increasingly popular culture is a site of activation where cultural meanings are mediated and co-produced by audiences (1993). The possibilities for such mobilizations of signifiers are explored in the my last chapter as a potential site/sight of teacher commitment.

[10] While many of these commentators write in a prose that is inaccessible to many, a more accessible treatment is Steinberg and Kincheloe (1997).

‘bringing to the surface’ *that which is obscured*. It is as if there is a world (the advertiser’s ability to manipulate impressionable young minds), that is already *under*stood by the me (the instructor seeing within the frame of the Cartesian *cogito*) who designed the assignment. As one student plaintively asked, “After all this criticism is done about women’s fashion – what should I wear tomorrow?” What are the effects of these cultural readings I insist on? By disrobing the Phallus are we ourselves naked before the world? Are students’ bodies sites for the discourse of the University to enjoy its own pleasure? As another student said, “Why should it matter if some women are so stupid they get sucked into this ‘ideal image stuff’ I do too. Don’t we all own a piece of this?”

enLIGTHening the Body

“So *whose* body are we talking about anyway?”, one student asked me when raising a question about their personal ~~response~~ to be written to the film *Dying to be Thin* (The question was: “To what extent does this film relate to your experience as a women in the culture of *dying to be thin*?”). I realized after hearing the question that the student was in fact raising an important question: whose body *matters* in this question? Another wrote in her assignment:

> I never really thought of myself controlling my body. I never really thought I had a body until I took health in grade 8. Before then I just did stuff before school to keep clean enough so my mother would stop getting on my case about being a slob.

I was reminded of Spivak’s own hesitation about calling forth a presence that powers a formation of identification that sets us off towards certain (predetermined) trajectories and questions about each other:

> If one really thinks about the body as such, there is no possible outline of the body as such. There are thinkings of the systematicity of the body, there are value codings of the body. The body, as such, cannot be thought, and I certainly cannot approach it (as cited in Butler, 1993, p. 1).

Likewise, “body” as a signifier does not float around freely in the classroom without the students themselves opening up a field of plural meanings that students populate with their own meanings.[11] From Levinas, I am mindful of the need for caring for alterity. Do the signifiers of “your body” and “women’s studies” act to distance students from themselves? Alterity is always from some where: students have a place in the world too. Into what abyss of self-betrayal and self-doubt do I throw my students? How do I answer Carol’s question in an essay she wrote for the assignment “The Body in Popular Culture?” Carol writes a hauntingly similar story to that of Sandra’s (from Chapter 1):

> What I like about looking at how the media constructs an ideal or perfect body is understanding why our society values ‘beauty’. Yet I don’t understand something we discussed in class – that somehow this is wrong. Last month I got a job waitressing over two other girls who applied. I heard from a friend that the boss loves girls with long hair and loves short skirts. So guess what I wore to the interview – combed my hair down and wore a low cut blouse with a short skirt…nothing too outrageous. So what am I supposed to do – tell society it is wrong? I needed the job – he was a pig - does this make me a bad person? This ‘body image’ stuff is for losers sometimes I choose not to be one of them. I’m sorry for them but what can I do?

Is Carol avoiding the incommensurability here of being thrown into a world that she understands as simultaneously full of illusions and possibilities for reaching out further than one is (getting a job and having ‘freedom’)? Or is this cultural literacy stuff, the ‘banal brain junk’, that the masses are indifferent to? Wark (1994) raises Baudrillard’s question about the indifference of the general population to questions that preoccupy academics (p. 160).

Consider Cathy’s response to the film, *Dying to be Thin*:

> I do not have a problem with bulimia, and though several times I did try starving myself, I am not anorexic either. Yet I do have a problem with accepting myself the way I am. I find in the last few years my body is changing so fast it’s weird. I do not know what to expect – one of my sisters is fat, the other is really gorgeous and the guys think she is hot....I am afraid of which one I will become. I know though, that by being more aware of films like this one that I

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[11] Žižek reinforces this point (in Osborne, 1996, p. 27), as does Bakhtin’s important work applied to feminist writing and resistance described in Hohne, 1994).

> won't be as easily misled as I was before. But I still want to look good. At least I won't feel so lonely.

For both the students, and myself, the film opens up the possibility of interrogating the other's preoccupation with body image, and one's own. Cathy is careful to distance herself from identification as "anorexic", although "several times I tried starving myself." Cathy's refusal to admit being previously misled by the discourse of thinness is important. I read in Cathy's refusal a commitment to enLIGHTened body shaping. Cathy's future is a presence she demands for her future. This presence is wanting to look good: in between two sisters: one "fat," one "hot." The film, a momentary engagement with Cathy's specular economy, calls forward her dread that constructs an antinomy: a future body someday that is neither "fat" or "hot", and also one that is an agentic self-construction of an enLIGHTened body that is minded (policed) by the superego. All the while, Cathy distances herself from these *others* who are easily misled. Yet I drop back on Cathy's comment. Where is this taking me – to a critique of the world of specular images that commands a presence of *liberated* vs. *false consciousness.*

Deconstruction and media literacy is hard work. It simultaneously affirms and denies our jouissance.

> ***Transect***
>
> Sure the Cindy Crawford Home Page is a Bookmark on my Netscape. I desire the impossibility she represents, looking at her always yields more pleasure than her picture gives up. I too chose to be misled by a footnote in the phantasm that I call my ideas and my dreams. Derrida and Lacan: their footnotes let me talk like an academic. Cindy Crawford and Anna Nicole Smith: their Bookmarks let me feel like a man. (Journal)

Sometimes in the class I turned by back on pleasure. As Žižek suggests, the master signifiers can have their phantasmatic spellbroken, not by ridding ourselves of jouissance but by unhooking it from the frames given to us (as cited in Salecl & Žižek, 1996a, p. 118). [12] I need more than the "ascetic rigor" of deconstruction and the students in my women's studies class that I stand to deputize as a posse ready to ride out in search of the banditry of jouissance. Life's most worthwhile experiences are those, Richard Poirier argues, akin the realm of art – where there is a "density" that offers "strong initial pleasures but also reveal themselves as complexly textured and that fruitfully resist our routine powers of understanding" (as cited in Edmundson, 1995, p. 110). Just how complex and textured these desires are is illustrated in the following.

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[12] Such is the project I undertake for myself in the next chapter.

Visiting the Horrible Pleasures of Jouissance

For Žižek, (1997) jouissance "is the place of the subject" where the individual confronts a "sinthome" of their being (p. 49). Identifying the jouissance of the other is the "encounter beyond the wall of language" – to see someone consumed by some tiny detail or gesture that represents an unfathomable intrusion from the Real (Žižek, 1996a, p. 139). The anxiety of losing something is not what produces pleasure – it is the threat of getting too close to it that does brings back the uncanny figure that commands jouissance. There is a familiar academic critique that problematizes the enLIGHTened specular economy of 'body image' dread that resonates in popular woman's magazines currently. This deployment of dread is refracted in a multiplicity of cultural discourses from nutrition to exercise to lifestyle management.

Consider the number one selling feminist magazine in Australia, *CLEO*. The June, 1995 issue features an extensive "Career Watch" article, profiling an aerobics instructor. Several women in the class read the magazine on a regular basis. One reported, "At times we feel guilty reading it but at others it is too good to resist." The "perks" of this employment include being paid to "keep in shape" and the pleasure of "endorphin rush" brought on by exercising (p. 64). The advertisements refer to "toning" and "firmness" rather than 'getting thin' (p. 138). Aside from numerous medical advice columns, the articles resonate with the pathologies of the aggressive individualism of late capitalism where the self becomes a grand architectural project. "Under the Influence" reviews the abuse of drugs and alcohol by movie stars. A "candid interview" with Drew Barrymore talks about her recovery from heroine addiction. "Skin Lies" – reveals "the biggest fallacies in the beauty business," while "Don't Worry It's Just Your Hormones" explains the (supposed) erratic mood swings women experience.

The guilty enjoyment of reading *CLEO* signals the horrible pleasure of jouissance. The master signifiers in the class momentarily returned the gaze on the reading of *CLEO*. The pre-modern era fixed us as looked upon and surveyed by the gods, the modern era positions us as the coherent agent that acts rationally upon the world with clearly defined ends and outcomes (the humanist project). Perhaps the postmodern condition (yet to be fully inhabited) situates subjects as unable to fix representations of a world where the Ideal Ego floats freely as pure affect – enjoy enjoyment!

I recall Carol's ambivalence about dressing up for a job interview and her lamentable question, "What am I supposed to do?" Carol is caught in the impossibility of an evil that she cannot escape. Her boss hired her because he "loved long hair and short black skirts."

Yet, how can I respond to Carol? Lacan might pass judgement on the boss as a kind of Evil Ego-Ideal – one whose "behavior is motivated by selfish calculation and greed" (see Žižek, 1994, p. 70). But Carol already knows he is a "selfish pig." Fiske (1993) might help strategize resistances to destabilize the syntagmatic chain that configures the boss' erotic investment in 'black skirts'. Butler (1997) argues convincingly that to maintain an "open future" we need to continually interrogate the language we use, since it is words that serve both the purposes of repression and mobilization (p. 162).

At the end of the day, Carol's alterity stands alone. It is her place, and only her place, where she stands. In her 'confession', Carol is stripped naked before me, echoing Levinas.[13] I remember feeling that I *needed* to be more than an academic – I wanted to help her out but maybe this was no response except a hollow feeling of wanting to be the boss? Yet I should be careful not to idealize her anxiety and questioning of her actions. This reminds me of Levinas' (1987) cautionary metaphor as The Other (*Autrui*), as "nudity" that emerges in the light of the unveiling, of the greeting and the conversation that brings forth a self for the other rather than for itself. Perhaps Carol has posed both *a question* and *her self* – just how seriously did she question her decision? Why should I ask such a question? Whose system of representation and logic do I wish to bring Carol into?

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[13] The Other, Levinas argues, stands in their nudity before us, not as an unveiling but in the rupture that elicits us. "The face is by itself and but reference to a system" (as cited in Lechte, 1994, p. 117).

I recall our conversation over a beer several weeks later. Carol admitted that she did not regret the decision she made about wearing the black dress. "Writing about what I did was weird because I felt guilty while thinking about what we are taking in the course. But after working for awhile I've learned how to handle the boss. Besides it is just a 'stupid job'. I recall her sense of resignation and matter-of-factness about her new boss. I was struck by the difference between our conversation in the bar and her response in our "women's studies class." The relationship between her confession and the two locations set in motion a very different chain of representations. Instead of Carol being caught between right/wrong, ethical/unethical in a women's studies class, she was now in the bar, caught in a different binary "job/poverty." There was a different set of syntagmatic relations in the two locations. In women's studies class, Carol said that she felt guilt. In the bar, she felt carefree. I cannot speculate about the motivations behind Carol's decision – I recall only the difference in her affect in the two locations. I do know, however that her simple distinction between job/poverty could have invited an exploration of the more privileged terms that remained hidden in her representation of being on the brink of "poverty" (Carol had only recently moved out of her home and could have moved back in if she was pressed to do so). *Desire*, for Carol, was named by the choice she made – the *job*. I cannot help but wonder about her desire for freedom and independence (to move out of the house) that was signified as "poverty." Was Carol's job now a different form of dependence and impoverishment? Only she can provide the mnemonic traces that will answer this question. Silverman (1983) is right though – "desire is in effect nothing more than a series of metaphors and metonymies, displacements away from the unconscious point of origin in which one term replaces another" (p. 115).

Consider a student's response to a segment in the film *Dying to be Thin* that reports that more American women fear getting fat than do dying.

> So, I work out once in a while and I walk a lot. I like looking good and eating well. This does not mean I'm an air-head. My mom wishes she could have kept her figure and says I will have a better

> body than her if I take care of myself. I don't want to get fat like my aunt – she is gross. But right now I don't need to worry because I'm young, but like my mother says, after I have a kid I'll chunk out if I'm not careful. Anyway, I probably won't have kids – who wants to blimp out and push kids around on strollers anyway?
>
> Louise

There is an specular economy of Louise's dread *deferred*. This becomes anxiety. Yet, what can one make from this bricolage that Louise offers. Working out "once and awhile" and deferring her concern – her overidentification with the strict realism of genetic determinism, maternity and the metonym of "chunking out"?

Again I am confronted with the practical, inassimilable exteriority that students present in the class. Rina writes,

> I don't really care about being thin. I just want to feel good. My goals for the last three years has been to lose 10 pounds and to quit smoking. This is hard to do when all my friends eat the same shit that I do....besides there is nothing else to do in this town but hang out. I might get a job – that will keep me busy.

In a Foucauldian reading of Rina's comments, the need to confess is prevalent in a society and circulated by the discourse of the University. In my classroom, we deployed the individual as *a self* (through the construal of a subject that is imbricated in having "goals") that is simultaneously *limited* and *enabled*. The vigour with which one polices the self interpellates the self as both subject and object. Dieting is, as Foucault would suggest, one of micro-technologies of *individuation* . Catrina Brown (1993) explores the mire of dieting power issues in the policing of the self as a subjectivity.

What of Levinas' ethical call to the plentitude that is inhered in the other? Is *disclosure* of a form of pedagogical predation that is for the self not the other? Sometimes I found myself asking, of the Phallus, can the predation here on female students stand in metonymically for the examination of the female's *écriture*? The deconstruction of disclosure needs an equivalency of enclosure, of recloaking. I share Brenda's sense of ambivalence in trying to button-down the source of her jouissance.

> Working at the Food Bank last year really reminded me how awful things are for a lot of people. I felt sort of stupid worrying about eating too much. Now hunger isn't what it used to be. I don't notice it as much and I don't care what/when I eat. Don't ask me why. Eating just happens.

From Levinas' (1994) sense of the ethical call of the other, I am reminded the students that signifiers can be put constantly in play. Yet, as hooks (1994) reminds me, "it is not easy to name our pain, to theorize from that (our body's) location" (p.74). From de Certeau's (1993) polymorphic creative forms of resistance, I share Fiske's hope for a re-population of master signifiers that marginalize and erase otherness (1993).[14]

If the body is the site where "the individual meets the social" (Fiske, 1993, p. 58), it worth considering the particular ways in which women work the disciplinary norms of the fetishization of what Sandra (in Chapter 2) described as the impossibility of having big tits and a small ass on the same body.

As Iris Young points out, a woman's chest is always "in question" or under scrutiny in the heterosexual male gaze. Like most norms of femininity, the normalized breast hardly describes an 'average' around which a real women's breasts cluster. It is an ideal that only a very few women's bodies even approximate. Given the power of the dominant media, however, the norm is ubiquitous (Young 1990, 192). As Young laments, most women live the "scandal" of their breasts: too small, too big, too saggy, too whatever. It is an incommensurability that brings forward a lack, a dread, that has no name.

Recall, from Chapter 2, Sandra's sense of "resolute repetition," of *Selbstandigkeit* (standing-by-yourself) and *Wiederholung* (resolute repetition in the face of one's worries and dread is of one's fundamental choice of selfhood). These are, according to Kellner (1995), the pivot points of Heidegger's sense of "authentic" action in the world. Standing up in the face of the world, emerges in Sandra's decision to tell the boys to "fuck off." Yet she shares with many women the difficulty of *being* 'thrown' (construed as *nude* by the boys taunting her), into a Symbolic regime that syntagmatically signifies women as objects. As well as for Sandra, there is "density" and "difficulty" for Carol's jouissance as she tries to unhook the male coded syntagmatic chain (S2 – in the discourse of the Master) that construes her as sex object.

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[14] For Fiske, since all imperializing power must invariably make known its will onto the site of the body, it is in the locales of particular bodies that construct "horizontal communities" (e.g. black captives who committed suicide on slaver ships, or resistances framed as "hysteria") that resistance is always possible.

Young (1990) reads the "chest is the house of the heart....that is an important center of a person's being" (p. 189). The imaginary hegemony of the Phallus brings Sandra and many other women into a representational construction that occludes their capacities to materialize their own breasted experience. As Young argues, this is no small loss.

> I may locate my consciousness in my head, but my self, my existence as a solid person in the world, starts from my chest, from which I feel myself rise and radiate. At least in Euro-American culture, it is my chest, not my face, that I point to when I signify myself. In Hindu philosophy of the body the chest is not only the center, but it has the integrative power among them. (p. 189).

In all of these narratives the breasted experience remains an inaccessibility. "Having breasts" within the economy of the heterosexual male gaze is a place from which I cannot see. In the discourse of the University, it is a material condition whose effects I am only able to see as a radical otherness.

THE BODY: *A There-It-Isness*[15]

After examining her own inquiries into the discursive materialization of the body in culture, Judith Butler (1993) rhetorically asks: "Does anything *matter* (my italics) in or for poststructuralism?" (p. 28). To speak about the body, which itself is an effect of discourse, is to raise the problem that we all eventually turn to in investigating the effects of power on our coming into the world through language. The problem is this: what do we scavenge when the wolves of deconstruction chew on the dogs of representation? What remains will be left for the ravenous academics (like me) who pick clean the bones left in the cultural field of everyday life through the discourse of the University. In the following concluding section, I describe how reading the film *Nell* with the class acted as a way for all of us to confront an alterity that defies the ego. Nell's character resonates

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[15] I draw on Levinas here: 'there is', from the German, *es gibt* an impersonal given from the sheer fact of being.

Levinas' *Altrui*, of an existence that is an alterity, "a rustling horror..." (Lechte, 1994, p. 116).

Nell as an Irreducible *Other*

> The face 'signifies' beyond, neither as an index nor as symbol, but precisely and irreducibly as a face that summons me. It signifies to-God, not as sign, but as the questioning of myself, as if I were summoned or called, that is to say, awakened or cited as myself (Levinas, 1983, 112).

Nell (Jodie Foster) is orphaned as a young woman living in the woods of North Carolina. After her reclusive mother dies, local officials start snooping around. Doctor Jerry Lovell (Liam Neeson) takes an interest in *Nell* who appears to him as more than the simpleton and feral curiosity that the locals consider her to be. Jerry travels to the big city to consult a psychologist named Paula Olsen (Natasha Richardson). Immediately the plot thickens - the university where Paula works takes an immediate interest in Nell as a clinical case that will bring fame to the research institution. Invariably, as the courts are drawn into the fray - who is best to decide Nell's fate? The court gives temporary joint custody to Jerry and Paula - who proceed to observe Nell's ability to fend for herself back home. The rest of the film revolves around the difficulties Nell encounters in communicating to the 'outside' world while Jerry and Paula almost come to blows over what to make of their feral captive.

Nell re-deploys the role of the adult child – a common often pattern seen in Hollywood films such as *Rain Man* and *Forrest Gump*. Unlike *Rain Man*, however, the tragic infirmities in this film (traces from *objet a*) cross all the characters. Nell's mother suffered a stroke and had spoken to the child in a distorted and lyrical speech that makes it appear Nell is autistic and/or a savage. Nell speaks an idioglossia, a chanting, emotive mixture of sound and bodily gesture. She is simultaneously human and animal. As she sways in the wind, swinging her arms she chants to herself, one with the trees and wind.

Nell is an enigma to the others of the Symbolic world. In her Imaginary she does not need for the world outside of her expressivity which is a mixture of language and dance. Nell does not lack, and in the Lacanian sense, she has not split her consciousness from the twin that died several years prior. Nell inhabits a pre-Oedipal world where her mother's tongue speaks the one voice of the two sisters. In the mirror phase Nell and Mae are caught in, there is fluidity and continuity that is reminiscent of a dream.

The point in the movie that reveals Nell's secret 'other' is the discovery of her sister's body. Mae is found laying in repose covered with daisies, left where she fell in a ravine years ago. The water and rocks, Nell and Mae, are a shrine that constitute a singularity that Jerry and Paula reveal as the key to unlocking Nell's relationship to the Real. Nell's secret is now "outed" – her chanting in front of the mirror and her rituals are speaking to the Other (Mae), one who occupies an articulated fullness in Nell's Imaginary. Nell's pleasure at gazing upon her decayed sister is unspeakable – as is her running through the forest naked or looking into her reflection in the lake. In her hallucinations and articulated fullness, Nell's phantasmic relation and intimacy with her surroundings that needs no outsiders stands as her answer to the Real. The questions from the outside helping professionals are used by the discourse of the University (the medical profession) to suture Nell into the master signifiers of "adapting" and "living independently" under sign of the big Other. The custody battle that ensues raises questions that are not of the Real. Nell cannot respond to them since no 'intelligible' response is possible. Her answer cannot be placed in the Symbolic since it is an answer that has no question. Nell's seeming hysteria causes the big Other (the Symbolic order) to collapse into the small other, *objet a*, the fantasy object (Žižek, 1994, p. 77).

It is when Nell confronts the Symbolic Order that her troubles begin. Her abject, unspeakable pleasure (a discourse of the Hysteric) confronts the discourse of the University. A crisis is imminent when Nell wanders into the local pool hall and encounters the local delivery boy and his macho friends (the delivery boy now will deliver more than the groceries to Nell...the Symbolic Order will have its way). The delivery boy prances around the room, grasping at his crotch, gesticulating at the possibility that lays before Nell as he takes off his shirt. Nell is unable to understand the symbolic violence she is being confronted with – the pool hall is not the male-coded territory of plunder where balls are hit into pockets. As Nell undresses and laughs hysterically at the boys in the pool hall, the eros falls out for the would be rapists. In a gesture to the returning of the gaze, one of them asks "is she crazy or what?" – the others look on in disgust (their abjection is again the *objet a* falling out of their looking). A semiotic square is construed here as Nell stands both as a *wild woman* and *innocent child.* In her jouissance, she is both desire and prohibition. Is this a child about to be raped by a man, or an animal about to rape a man? Is this a women who seems like a child or a child who looks like a women? As Nell raises up her dress the gaze of the male coded imminent rape is returned with the specular image of the perversion – w*hat am I to the Phallic Other*? Here Nell foists the question back on to the big Other – she raises from the Real her jouissance as both arousal and anxiety.

Žižek (1994) brilliantly draws on Shakespeare's Coriolanus when he reminds us that there can be no greater violence than to expose to public view the *objet a* in the self: "to hear my nothings monster'd" (p.77). As Žižek suggests, "even if women somehow and sometimes do want to be taken roughly " there is nothing more humiliating than to force a woman, against her will, to comply with her desire" (p. 78). This is, as Žižek suggests, a postmodern evil where the kernel of desire, *objet a*, is targeted and destroyed. To expose a women's desire in a rape is the ultimate violence. The scene in the pool hall is a poignant one as *Nell* stands before the gaze of the would be rapists. Theirs is a demand that has been turned into a monstrous one by the abject, the unspeakable hysteric.

Nell's relationship with Jerry is equally ambivalent. Jerry's fascination with Nell slides between his desire to protect her from the outside world (to preserve her autonomy) and the practical requirement that Nell needs to change in order to stand up for herself in court and the symbolic order. As Jerry observes Nell in her cabin he comes to realize that "there is no one else in the world like her." "She doesn't need anybody." Jerry is actually reprising Lacan's dictum, "Do not give up your desire" (as cited in Žižek, 1994, p. 70).

There is no way out for Jerry. He cannot escape the pathological objects that seduced him to betray his desire - the greater his guilt the more the Superego draws the energy to pressure him into the symbolic order. Jerry cannot have Nell, he can only marry Paula. Nell looks on one evening as Jerry and Paula squabble. Nell walks forward and has them put their heads together – their reasons for fighting (what who is right/wrong) are erased as their impairment is revealed. Nell infantalizes them and has them simply standing toe to toe, unable to gaze into each other's eyes, only able to confront the incommensurabilities of their guilt staring back at them from the floor, sacrificing themselves to their pathological boundlessness of the Symbolic.

At this point in the movie, I read an answer to Jerry's earlier question to Paula. As Jerry wonders at Nell's ability to live alone, not without lack, he asks, "Can you live your whole life that way, or does it drive you crazy in the end?" It is significant that Jerry addresses a collective 'you', when he ponders Nell's happiness. In the end it is Jerry and Paula who are rescued by the Symbolic. Nell remains in exile. Their fear for Nell, the threat that "a child is being beaten" in the Name-of-the-Father (the university and the court system), is a fear that is split "between fascination and enjoyment" and the "yearning to rescue the women from her torturer is hindered by the implicit knowledge that the victim is enjoying her suffering" (Žižek, 1994, p. 75). Throughout the film we see Paula and Jerry reveal their stories. They admit to themselves, as the film proceeds, the horrible pleasure they realize as doctors and academics whose lives are not their own but those of the big Other. They have a life in the Symbolic that they enjoy – but it is also a life continually threatened by the possibility of falling into the hole of *objet a*. Paula breaks down at one point in the film – revealing her secret that she is not whole. There is irony here as Paula the psychologist reveals her own empathy sickness – her recognition that she has tried all of her professional life to distance herself from her own emotional pain by trying to help others with theirs (an inversion of the discourse of the analysand where Paula becomes the Hysteric). Paula and I (like many in the 'helping professions') suffer this same empathy sickness. With 'proper training' in the discourse of the University, we learn to avoid our own jouissance.[16]

In Paula's childhood love and affection were not given – Jerry has a failed marriage because he cannot *give* emotionally. Both are guilty by (lack of) association

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[16] **I always wonder about looking down a great height and staring into the impulse that many people have shared with me (to jump?). Is this what flows up from the Real? To do something – to bring the ground closer; since the subject cannot admit its own failure to recognize the indeterminacy and contingency of its own being. Jumping confirms the message that the Real cannot be allowed to say to us.**

(pun intended) to the Superego. Jerry and Paula, as Lacan would say, are guilty of giving up their desires through their own empathy sickness (Paula loves the 'mental cases' in the university's clinic; Jerry loves the sick, the losers, the dispossessed). Žižek reminds me of Lacan here – both Jerry and Paula cannot redeem their guilt by helping Nell and still be faithful to their own desires. This helps me understand the disappointment I felt at the end of the film as Jerry and Paula are married with children, and Nell is still the one who does not lack. As the film closes, Nell embraces their daughter and initiates her to the wonderment of the water, the trees and the wind (an out thereness, a *jouissance of Nature*?).

Things are back to normal, and the artifice of the Superego is reconfigured to give me an ambivalence as the film closes. I am reminded of Žižek's (1994) claim that "the artifice of looking for excuses is boundless" (p. 68). The superego cannot parasitize Nell since she has no guilt. Jerry and Paula are another story however, perhaps my own. The audience walks out but can never walk away. What follows is a diagrammatic representation of Nell as an occupant of the three registers of the hysteric-pervert-psychotic that Žižek maps out for the psychoanalytic relation (p. 85).

What Am I to the Other?

	Position of Desire	Problem Position	State of Desire
hysteria	ambivalence	Are you okay with me?	Desire a multiplex from impotence to raging passion.
perversion	arousal/anxiety	What am I for you? Question is displaced onto the viewer.	Desire 'monstered'. The unspeakable raised to the level of consciousness.
psychosis	self-doubt, interrupted communication	Are you o-k? A question that really is an answer from the Real (Nell asks this question from the Real – a question that cannot be answered.)	Desire falls out. Addressee sets props and artifice to make sense of *non sense.*

In each of the three registers of hysteria, psychosis and perversion, Nell raises the issue for me of the place I occupy as an instructor in a women's studies class. In asking women to respond to the film in terms of their reading of Lacan, I too must ask Nell's question of myself: *Are you okay?*

> ***Transect***
>
> No I'm Not okay, teaching in a high school where staff moral is low and student apathy runs high....driving to courses to fulfill my residency requirement for a doctoral degree...trying to keep up the demands for a father of three children and wife at home who wants me to spend more time with her. I am a body out of place(s). I am the sum of the violations and interruptions I visit upon myself. As the Phallus speaks through me I find myself trying to *keep it up* at work, at school, running, and in bed. Many days I do all poorly.
>
> (Journal)

I live in the paradoxes and locations that become inhabitable habitations: I respond as an hysteric. I draw on the master signifiers of the discourse of the University, yet these are void of content as my own readings of Nell evoke uncanny and elusive responses. Like my students, I am in Lacan's sense "a stain which is the subject." One of my students, Louise, writes of *Nell*:

> I cried when she stared into the eyes of the sheriff's wife. The wife looked more sad than I feel on my worst days. When Nell asks her "are you okay?" the sheriff's wife plaintively smiles back.

Lori writes of the near-rape scene in the pool hall:

> I was so upset here, it reminded of me of the time I got wasted in Gr. 11 and was at a party with a bunch of people. Somehow it happened that all the other girls sort of drifted home and I was left with these three guys. When I realized after an hour or so that I had been alone and 'out of control' with these guys I got really afraid when a couple of them started trying to feel me up. I didn't know them very well and I felt scared. I told them I was going to the bathroom and just took off home instead.

Lori asks:

> Is this the Law-of-the-Father that I must live under? Why should a girl be afraid of getting drunk and partying with a bunch of guys. This is a pleasure we are not allowed.

A Metis student, Debbie, sees in *Nell* the difficulties she has speaking a language that others do not share.

> When I think of the stigmatization I had to go through when I was a child it makes me really angry. I remember Columbus – a guy who was lost when he called this place "India." So I was called Indian by others who took up the signifier of an idiot who was lost...My question is who is *more lost* me or white people?

For Debbie, Nell lives as an undiscovered country, an abject Other, who must be brought into the Symbolic Order of the big Other.

> The political order gives life to the name I am called – Indian. Just like Nell I am called names, and am an object of derision. Every time it is spoken "Indian," I cry inside, maybe like Nell does now when she sits and thinks about Jerry and Paula and their yuppie life style. That's why I hated the ending of the movie. It was confirmation that Nell (and me) are brought back to where we belong – given a place that is within the Symbolic Order but helps me forget the Imaginary possibilities I once had as a child who was not other living on a trap line.

Debbie finds in *Nell* a way to speak about a possibility of resisting the markers that create so many (im)passes for her on a daily basis.

> Speaking white is something we had to do. This meant losing our "accents" and the guttural "ch" sound that is so common in Cree. I still feel the bottom of my throat tighten up when I speak English – I must stop myself from sounding out my "t's" like "d's." Sometimes I hear native people sounding like 'Indians' now that I've been in university for three years. Friends will come by and ask "*gowen downtonne*?" Maybe I'm like Nell, slowly disappearing and passing my time as white language washes over me, cleaning me down to the pores so that I even smell my own whiteness now.

Debbie catches herself caught in the tensions of trying to figure out the importance of a name "to call myself," a place to call herself. As she admits, drawing on hysteric significations:

> aboriginals? – they are in Australia? What about Indians? They are in India. But what did they call themselves before? Fuck it – why can't we just be "daye in da winnde" (Nell's chanting of "trees in the wind").

For another student, Sandra, *Nell* resonates with Žižek's rhetorical question about modernity: why despite the removal of most institutional forms of control is the modern subject not free? Sandra describes the scene in the movie where Paula encourages Nell to look at Jerry's penis. Frightened at being "skewered in the belly" by the "evadas" (screwed in the belly by the evil doers), Nell resists. At her encouragement Nell climbs in the water with Jerry and overcomes her mother's prohibition. As Gina writes, "What is the construction of the feminine that is going on here?"

> Jerry has a penis – he is an evil doer in the phallic order of things as they are in the world. Let us not forget that half of the women in Canada report having been sexually assaulted in North America.

I was reminded by Gina's question of the incommensurability of Nell's position at the end of the film. Jerry and Paula have children – they enjoy the Father of Enjoyment. What does Nell have left but a bricolage? Denied, in the Symbolic, the enjoyment of the Father, Nell is disallowed loving *man* since she is hysteric-perverse-psychotic. She carries too much a piece of the Real, the stain of the *objet a*, exclusion of her as its object. Nell's mother was raped not only by the "evil doers" but by the Bible as well. As her mother believed there would be punishment for the "evil ones", so too did Nell. Her redemption would come from the acquisition of language – her entry into the Symbolic realm. While almost consumed by the legal system, she is left in limbo – out of the (legal) woods but still in the (Phallic) woods. Jerry and Paula and their real child now come to visit Nell in her cabin. The sheriff and his wife come to visit, too. The Master has settled down for a picnic – the serenity of it all in the closing moments of the film exposes the power of the Phallus' greatest moment – when it is cloaked.

For many of my students, the closing of the film is perhaps its most powerful and most disappointing point. "What kind of shitty ending is that?" asked one student. "Where does she go from here?" There is in this question a frustration with the place Nell is in the syntagmatic chain? She is simultaneously re-infantalized and left to hover over the hole of her Imaginary – the movie closes as she plays with the children of the cloaked Phallus. Nell becomes the being who speaks but cannot have a location in the syntagmatic chain of the Phallic order. One reading is that she is the sublime hysteric, left to baptize the infant into the sacred water of the Real? Or has another student asked, is she the girl-child/big sister who will play with the girl while Paula, Jerry, the good sheriff and his wife munch on their picnic?

Closing Places

The mire that lives in between tensions and my intentionality resonate Levinas' description of "Being" as a "givenness," a horrible "haunting spectre" that is an ambiguity that lives below our (symbolic) consciousness that tries to run away from the "there is… the shadow of being" (as cited in Lechte, 1994, p. 112). For me, interrogating the female *body* as a "givenness" to women, I find Levinas' (1987) ethics helpful (p. 31). Sometimes my questions are returned from the Real, since for my students there is a "there *it isness*" in living a breasted experience with its hopes and horrors, enchantments and disenfranchisements. Theirs is a world whose public and private spaces bring both horror and possibility – simultaneously inviting and repelling; a simulacrum of the carnival and the grotesque.

For many students in my women's studies class, their jouissance can be read as a *pleasant horror*, a "sheer fact of being" a woman that is a radical alterity. What is at stake for many females is the difficulty of living with that which is the abject given, "The rustling of *the there* is...*as horror*" as Levinas writes allegorically of Being. *Body image* remains a signifier of possibilities, phantoms, and ghosts of what they (we) are and could become. Perhaps student responses to 'body images' are imaginary registers of doubts, ambivalences, and uncertainties, of an agonal politics of living an *otherness* and *lack* that is a "sheer fact of being." This is a sense of an agonal dread, a "givenness" of Being that is Levinas' allegorical equivalent of *the night*, *the incommensurable*.

For Žižek (1994), the most pernicious type of evil is that which appears to give us no choice but to destroy ourselves (pp. 70-71). This "radical evil" originates from an idealized good that climbs from the maw of our own misrecognitions to devour us. The development of the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction was one such form of radical evil. Each of the superpowers assured its own security by assuring death to all of humanity in the event of an aggressive act by an enemy. This is the form of diabolical evil we recognize as the Abraham's dilemma – where the (Master's) signifying chain gives us no choice but to destroy what we love the most. Perhaps at times I am complicit in perpetrating this form of malevolence on my students by asking them to 'make sense' of being a woman in the suture attempted by the discourse of the University. But then, as one student said to me over coffee,"Don't sweat it so much – we are all big enough to take care of ourselves." Are we really all "big enough" – "erect enough?" "... enough"? Perhaps we are all on parole – signified along the syntagmatic chain gang of the symbolic. Maybe Richard Corliss (1994) is right – "*Nell* is *Forrest Gump* in the Forest" and this movie is a naïve retro-conservatism that privileges idiocy over thought, romanticism over engagement with society's ills. Serious as the charges that have been made against *Forrest Gump* (that it is a form of retro-fascism), I wonder that perhaps too Nell's predicament in the movie and our engagement with her in this women's studies class was not some evil that we have perpetuated on ourselves. After reading my students' responses to *Nell*, I wonder if I am not Jerry in my (dis)guise as a man interested in women's issues. Has their work become an heteroglossia that I have propped up in this chapter?

Moving from living *in tensions* to living *with intention* has been framed in this chapter by my work as a male instructor in a women's studies course. This course has represented to me, an intersection between the symbolic vectors of the Lacanian phantasm and the biological possibilities of the material septum: this meeting point called the indeterminateness of the *female body* that Butler (1993) speaks of in *Bodies that Matter*. Women's studies is a place that remains for me a place of alterity, a contingency of *tensions* invested in as *intentions* – a horrible pleasure.

As a gesture to my own 'lost and found' jouissance, I draw on Raj Pannu's "Post-modern Lover" that, for me, gestures towards the *(im)passes* that I have encountered:

> Let us deconstruct pedagogies
> You and I
> My post-modern lover.
> (The pornographic eye)
> (The pornographic eye)
> (Objectifying the objectified)

Go ahead post-modern stud
Go ahead and signify me
the significant Other
I, the sublimated eye,
a reification of your recursive need,
a construct of your phallic imperative.

And. (Oh baby!)
If you didn't insist upon ejaculating
your obscurationist abstractionisms
into my imploding subjectivity.
Why honey.
I'd be nothing more than a tragic exotic.
Haunting the periphery of discourse.

Come my darling, (literally and figuratively!)
Let us ardently theorize about our mutual positioning
within the canonical tradition of the Masque Grotesque.
And yet, unlike the masses.
(otherwise known as those ignorant sorry bastards
who fuck, bonk, get their potatoes cooked etc.)
We, the literate practitioners of a civilized heuristic,
will merely subvert the institutionalized hegemony
that is maintained by the Heterosexual Romantic Love
Paradigm.

Now, my angst-ridden genius,
what do you presuppose will be the end result
of our dialogic consensus?
Well, what else?
An aborted (id)entity.
Raj Pannu (1995)

Chapter 6

Living Some Cruel Symptoms

> The wager is…that helping subjects analyze their responses to cultural artifacts and discourses can provide an opportunity for them to begin to working through some of their more debilitating and destructive conflicts of identification and desire, and that such working through can open the way not only to greater jouissance for these subjects but also through the resulting changes in their attitudes and behavior, to benefit social change.
>
> Bracher, 1993, p. 191-192

> For I know that nothing good dwells in me , that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish. Romans, 8: 18-20

My commitment to media studies and cultural literacy described in the previous chapter infuses my work as a high school social studies teacher. This chapter explores some of my hesitations in doing media studies with high school students. Specifically, I examine the how a particular artifact of popular culture, a video called *Supermodels in the Rainforest*, raises questions about the ways that I (m)ask myself in the classroom (jagodzinski, 1996, p.38) within the "impossible positionalities" that make up my teaching. Given my background in feminism and psychoanalysis, and my social position as a middle-class heterosexual male, I point to myself as *suspect*, paradoxically located as one who can draw on the cultural capital of the master signifiers circulated by the discourse of the University. This plurality of signifiers acts as a way to support the economy of the Phallus within my writing and teaching through the continual approbation and disapprobation of S1 ('the truth').[1] As a heterosexual middle-aged male who moves within the communities of the academy and public schools, I remain privileged as a member of the chattering classes.[2]

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[1] As indicated earlier in Chapter 3, the operational imperative of the discourse of the University is to foreclose the chance that students can ever know 'the truth' (S1).

A central problem for teachers today is the invocation to engage the *future* as a presence that must be 'pre-dicted' and then mediated by the sheer will of rational discourse.[3] "Each epoch dreams the next" (Benjamin, as cited in Foster, 207,1996). A symptom of this demand to shape the future is the expectation that we can actually can represent (and understand) the present. Increasing calls for media literacy in the schools is an indicator of this psychic demand. Configured in this way, the learning outcome is the student with "a critical inquiring eye," one who can see behind the subjective looking that we do. This chapter argues that such pedagogical moves cannot be undertaken without acknowledging how desire is always at work within the network of looks and gazes within the classroom. These desires are activated in a variety of ways and need to erupt in moments that recognize that no one individual holds the Phallus. In such a way, teaching needs to be open to its own opposites: to de-suture its own master signifiers to de-objectify the objects of knowledge.[4]

At war in the society of the spectacle, teachers are encouraged to spawn a cadre of semiotic guerrillas that will illuminate the relationships between power and representation. As Iaon Davies (1995) suggests, being politically aware and conscious of the liberatory possibilities of cultural studies has been an important impulse that consistently runs through the debates about 'what is cultural studies?' The social studies teacher, enamored with the possibility of creating students with a critical eye(I), is denied jouissance within the postmodern terminus – unable to meet the impossible demand to live the future before it happens. From British cultural studies' appropriation of postmodern critique and the impulse to connect the academic and street worlds to the American academy's concern for 'what counts as knowledge', cultural studies remains a site of much hand wringing. Dispersed and fragmented as cultural studies is in the academy, there have been passionate calls for a politically-engaged cultural studies that links the hypertrophied intellectual debates of postmodernism and deconstruction to the level of the street. Doug Kellner (1995) gestures towards such a stance in the United States (1995). Certainly Canada has started to see the growth of media culture critique from institutions such as McGill and York (Straw, 1993) and through the publications of magazines such as *Border/Lines*, *Adbusters* and *Fuse*.

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[2] I owe the designation "chattering classes" to Stephen Lewis, who reminded teachers in a speech several years ago that academic communities in Canada have increasingly privileged "studying" as opposed to "acting" on issues of social injustice.

[3] In Chapter 7 I will explore how the invocation 'to get to the future before it happens' is the impulse for the integration of technology in public schools.

My work with students viewing *Supermodels in the Rainforest* (Astral Video Productions, 1994) takes up Lacan's (1988) recognition that if images are "our animal weakness" (p. 88). Then, a central problem in teaching media studies has to be about the teacher's paradoxical relationship of desire with the specular images that invigorate and mediate our relationship with the Real. In particular, I want to explore the two forms of the split subject or separation I encounter in the Symbolic register that are hysteria and obsession.

I argue that teaching, occupying a place in between the discourse of the University and the Master, invariably locates the subject within the tension between having not enough pleasure (hysteria) and too much pleasure (obsession). Lured as I am by the video, I realize that "you can refuse what you despise but you can also refuse what you like too much" (Soler, 1996, p. 253). In scenes from the video, I will argue that both myself and my students are caught in what Žižek (1996) calls la *traverse du fantasme* (p. 117). From Žižek, I will argue that working with *Supermodels in the Rainforest* was, for me, one of learning how to "gain the minimum of distance toward the phantasmatic frame that organizes one's enjoyment" and then to momentarily "suspend its efficiency" (p. 117). From Žižek I draw the impulse to suggest that my attraction and enjoyment of *Supermodels in the Rainforest* is not the enemy. Obviously my libidinal investment in the video is one that is lured all the way down. The point is not to get rid of jouissance as Žižek argues, but to "unhook" jouissance from the phantasmatic frames that support its presence in my affect. Such an act of "unhooking" will offer a new way of seeing the

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[4] Again from Žižek (as cited in Osborne, 1996) we need the Phallus can be used to open the field of plurality. As I address the desires I bring into the classroom in what follows, I do so as a gesture that

phantasm as an "undecidability" that remains part of my inertia and momentum as a teacher. According to jag jagodzinski (1996), Lacan was both his own analysand and analyst (p. 30).

To write and teach in a language that produces 'double writing' is a ploy that I undertake with some trepidation. Rather than being someone who is *supposed to know* (the position of the teacher in the discourse of the University where the teacher invokes the students to learn more and more) or as someone who has the power over what is kept secret (the Master holding S1). I read myself as the neurotic o(su)ffering the symptoms of hysteria and obsession. These symptoms are emblematic of the neurotic defending against an incompatible idea (Soler, 1996, p. 249). Again, my classroom lives in a nexus of time where teachers and teaching is either "too early or too late," where "consciousness is premature or after the fact" (Foster, 1996, p. 207). Here is the Lyotardean sense that the postmodern calls us to live through the insistence of the reconstructed past and future. The *subject of the present* and the *present of the subject* are genealogies that are co-emergent in my subjectivity and as such remain radically inaccessible.

A Confession: Guilty or (K)Not?

What follows is a struggle for a way of writing/knot writing that avoids the illusory promise of self-discovery or critical reflection that jagodzinski cautions against. I begin/end in a postmodern interrogation of my complicity as a researcher. You could say that this chapter gathers up the usual suspects housed in the unconscious. As a male, middle aged high school teacher who claims to be a committed environmentalist and advocate for gender equality, how can I (not) live with myself being attracted to the video *Supermodels in the Rainforest*? I first stumbled upon the video in late 1995 when I received an advertisement billing the program as a fundraising effort to raise public awareness about the destruction of the rainforest. Marketed as a "celebration of music,

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invokes a de-suturing of the teacher as Master.

beauty and life," the video was a one hour long polysemic text that claimed to be a "video documentary."[5]

But how could I justify buying such a video for my social studies classroom? The superego dictated my crime before I could commit it, "What are you thinking - you are a teacher - you can't possibly use this!" Yet, as Žižek (1994) draws from Lacan, "the art of looking for excuses is boundless" (p. 68). So here is one excuse. In 1995, the video received Gold Awards at both the Worldfest-Houston International Film Festival and the Worldfest-Charleston International Film Festival. How about this excuse? The video is entertaining for students. It is structured around a series of eight photo shots featuring each model. Interspersed in each shot is a brief commentary by one of the models, a narrative dubbed by a commentator who describes a variety of threats to the globe because of the destruction of the rainforest. Each model is given three minutes of exposure (ex-posure?), either dancing or being photographed for a calendar with the same name as the video. "Surely the students will get a lot out of this polysemy of pleasures," I thought.

In writing all of this I realize the real eyes of the superego are still looking. The story I am telling no longer makes sense. In Lacanian terms, "I no longer have a coherent self to make sense of" (See Žižek, 1994, p. 77). My embarrassment writing about these 'teacherly' justifications for ordering the video and showing it to my students is a self-erasure, a falling away from an 'ex-timate body' that used to be a name I used to locate 'myself' in the discourse of the University (as a concerned 'academic' studying the environment). What follows as I describe my viewing of the video with a class of grade 12 students is not an effort to mediate or negotiate a rational 'teacherly' self back into the classroom. Rather, I take up the (pre)text that Žižek (1994) draws from Lacan that "the only truly ethical stance is to assume fully the impossible task of symbolizing the Real, inclusive of it necessary failure" (p. 200). In this context, what follows is a description of an empty set – what maybe a ridiculous pretext for showing what desire is; more desire.

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[5] This award-winning documentary features Sabrina Barnett, Nicole Breach, Leilani Bishop, Brooke Boisse, Tasha Moto Cunha, Darja Lingenberg, Rebecca Romijin, Brenda Schad and Frederique Van Der Wahl.

"Desire is desire for a desire" (p. 211). So here/hear are the my savage (w)rites against my place in the discourse of the University.

The *inquiring eye (I)* in the social studies curriculum suggests that the teacher moves into media studies by 'seeing' behind the camera, by developing a critical 'eye' that understands how reality is constructed through codes of production that circulate particular ideologies and values. In what follows, I will outline the text of the *Supermodels in the Rainforest* video and identify ways in which I worked with one class of grade 11 students drawing on strategies from the *Adbusters* magazine and the work of Henry Jenkins' (1992) *Textual Poaching*.

The first segment of the video features the international model Frederique Van der Wahl, known principally for her role in *Victoria's Secret* catalogues and more currently her line of fragrances. Framed against the backdrop of the Costa Rican rainforest, Frederique's allure, for me, is configured around the snare of vision and sound. Following is an excerpt from a monologue she delivers halfway through her portion of the video.

> What is happening to the rainforest is really terrible, is really disastrous, for example in certain places. I mean hearing about certain places I can't name because of the government guards behind me where 80 to 90% will be gone in a few years because of capitalism and certain issues what are not that important... it will effect everything in our world today... I think people should fight for this cause.
>
> Frederique Van Der Wahl

A diegesis is constructed around the rhyming effects of music track, narration and the pastoral foreground. Here we are in the realm of what was. Soon we will be confronted with the disaster of the cutting down of the rainforest. Frederique's reference to the off-camera "government guards" introduces an extradiegetic element to the scene. Here is an evoked off-screen presence that is a stand-in for the big Other, the monster that threatens "the immaculate dream."

The polysemic quality of the video is further evident in this excerpt when one considers the dialogic play of narration utterance, music and location. The fusion of narration, the *Duran Duran* song and the background rainforest shots act to construct "spatial and temporal indicators...fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 84). The effect here is to construct the sense of interconnectedness of time and space, or what Bakhtin called "chronotopes."

In the dialogic construction along axis of meaning, the *Supermodels* video plays these axes: nature-technology, intruder-native and sensual-mechanicized. As Richard Middleton (1995) has done in his reading of gender construction and agency in Eurythmics' hit recordings, one can see in the *Supermodels* video the dialogic play between audience subjectivity, the interactive voices (the diegetic and extradiegetic narration) set against music background and the visual settings.

In this sequence the transition from shot to shot is saturated with the mediations of the *Duran Duran* lyrics from the song "Come Undone" that circulate around the Imaginary invocations of an "immaculate dream made breath and skin' and the invocation to fight for the rainforest.

> Mine, immaculate dream made breath and skin
> I've been waiting for you
> Signed, with a home tattoo,
> Happy birthday to you was created for you
>
> (can't ever keep from falling apart
> At the seams
> Can't I believe you're taking my heart
> To pieces)
>
> Oh, it'll take a little time,
> might take a little crime
> to come undone now
>
> (PRECHORUS)
> We'll try to stay blind
> to the hope and fear outside
> Hey child, stay wilder than the wind
> And blow me in to cry
>
> (CHORUS)
> Who do you need, who do you love
> When you come undone
> (repeat)
>
> (Verse 2)

Words, playing me deja vu
Like a radio tune I swear I've heard before
Chill, is it something real
Or the magic I'm feeding off your fingers

(Can't ever keep from falling apart
At the seams
Can I believe you're taking my heart
To pieces)

Lost, in a snow filled sky, we'll make it alright
To come undone now
From *Duran Duran* lyric sheet, 1993

On first brush there is a haunting, enigmatic quilting of a rhetorical question for me. I become overcome with active anaclitic desire; wanting to possess the image of Frederique until, of course, I realize she is just an image. But she remains for me what is left outside the image. I struggle for what Lacan would call the *point de capiton*, a signifier that will button down my desire for here (see Bracher, 1993, p. 29). As the *Duran Duran* song plays on I want to be *the One* for Frederique, *the One* who will be there when she 'comes undone'. Such a desire is the passive anaclitic form of Symbolic Order desire (to be the bearer of the master signifiers that the other wants). I can feel the music and video work on me as I see myself being the one for the other. Then I snap back. Jouissance fades.

I move in Žižek's (1994) reading of my desire to be both the one for Frederique, the obsessional neurotic and the hysteric.

> The obsessional neurotic wants to prevent, by means of compulsive rituals, the Other's desire from emerging in its radical heterogeneity, as incommensurable with what he thinks he is for himself (p. 177).

For the obsessional neurotic, the catastrophe is that everything depends on him. For the hysteric the catastrophe is that nothing depends on him. Perhaps this is where the subliminity of the video clip of Frederique slides for me; as a traumatic crossing in between the voided Imaginary possibilities of being the *no-thing* and *every-thing* for Frederique. I am denied any possibility of the subliminity of 'love'. She cannot fall in love with me since I am nothing more than myself – a fan who looks from afar. She remains 'uncomed and done' – a cruel reversal of my desire.

This scene also raises the issue of the role of the voice in *Supermodels in the Rainforest*. As Mary Ann Doane suggests, the voice in cinema acts, as Lacan calls it, as the "invocatory drive" (*la pulsion invocatrice*) (as cited in Stam, 1992, p. 60). The voice remains throughout the film infrequently used. Indeed, except for Frederique's commentaries, the bulk of the narrative text is provided by a secondary narrator. A metadiegetic level is thus inserted. The numerous statistics provided in the film punctuate dance scenes and panning shots of the various models.

What one notices throughout the video is the lack of fluidity in the voice-overs of the models. They are given sporadic moments to construct a story line or background to the what Bakhtin (1986) would call the "centripetal" forces of the video towards a unity of the video as a photo shot/travel log. As one female student remarked, "This is pretty stupid – striptease Greenpeace."

Without the secondary narration and the metonymy of the river as a means of transportation, the video would remain incomprehensible. I draw on Fiske's (1996) metaphor of culture as a river of discourses (p. 7). Within the flow of competing representations and events there is continuity and disjuncture as well as undercurrents and dominant flows.

> Currents that had been flowing together can be separated, and one turned on the other, producing conflict out of the calmness. There are deep powerful currents carrying meanings of race, gender and sexuality, of class and age: these intermix in different proportions and bubble up to the surface as discursive "topics, " such as "family values or "abortion"…and these discursive "topics" swirl into each other - each is muddied with the silt of the others, none can flow in unsullied purity or isolation (p.7).

Reading Fiske's metaphor into the *Supermodels* video might seem over-determined given the preeminence in the video of the river scenes that run through the program. The lengthy dance scenes, juxtaposed against the scenes of devastation were incongruous and difficult for the students to make sense of.

Consider one of the model's, Darja Lingenberg's explanation of the project as not some "normal bathing suit calender… it is going to be beautiful and it is for a purpose." As the camera fades out from her sitting on the beach, a fade – in takes the viewer to her dancing on beach at sunset, and then to her writhing around in a boat dressed in a body suit, complete with *faux* snake scale designs.

Mary Ann Doane (1991) raises Freud's evocation of the torrid dark continent of Africa as a metaphor for female sexuality in the patriarchal code of imperial conquest and exploration (p. 209-48). For me this is a reading of the video that reminds that there is virtually no reference made to the specific location of the video shot. We are only obliquely told that in the credits and advertising material that accompanies the video that it is shot in the Costa Rican rainforest. For Doane, a journey to "torrid zones" represents for the West, a journey without maps or referents. Indeed, I would draw from Doane's claim that hot zones are the realm of the Imaginary – places where all things are possible in the mind of modernity.[6] As Pile and Thrift (1995) argue, the imagination of the west is not configured around "the construction of the self around some arrogantly figured Other. Some blank hot zone of darkness," rather, it is construed around "the cold hard facts" of a world where precision was necessary for survival and colonization (pp. 90-91).

As Fiske (1996) reminds us, in the postmodern world there can no longer be construed something framed as a singular "media event" (p. 2). Fiske has little patience for the debate about what constitutes the 'real' event since it is the representation and mediation of that event within the "language in social use" that constructs the structure of our understanding of an event. This structure of "language in use" he calls "discourse."

> Discourse can never be abstracted from the conditions of its production and circulation in the way that language can. The most significant relations of any piece of discourse are to the social conditions of its use, not the signifying system in general, and its analysis exemplifies not an instance of that system in practice, but its function in deploying power within those conditions (p. 3).

The *Rainforest* as Piece of the Real

The threat to the rainforest is certainly a media event that has become a *cause celebre* in the west. *Starbucks*, a Seattle based chain of specialty-coffee shops, recently sponsored a coffee symposium at the annual American Association for the Advancement of Science that examined the implications of increased coffee exports on Latin America's ecology (*Edmonton Journal*, February 17, 1997, A1). With half of the arable land in Latin America now devoted to coffee growing, pressure to open up marginal lands for agriculture is growing. Yet until the structural inequities in world trade are dealt with, it is unlikely that Latin American countries can withstand the pressures on its land resources.

When countries such as Costa Rica attempt to create parks, these nature preserves are undermined the hysteric 'foreign tourist' who travel to the parks to capture their beauty before they disappear. Consider Costa Rica's Manuel Antonio Park, a 1,700 acre reserve that was established in the mid 1980's (*Edmonton Journal*, January 5, 1997, E7). Now with over 600 visitors a day, the ecology of the park is threatened. On the perimeter of the park there are over 100 hotels and bed and breakfast establishments. A marine reserve adjoining the park now attracts sports fisherman who pay $800 a day to catch a tuna. Casinos and luxury hotels are now in the works. The entire country is now seen as a leader in environmental protection a media construct that has brought over 800,000 visitors a year and contributed $700 million to the Costa Rican economy last year in 1996. Tourism is now the country's main source of income. Can "eco-adventures" be the answer to Costa Rica's future? Searching for that pristine promise of untouched wilderness has rendered the 27 other Costa Rican parks a desired destination for increasing numbers well-intentioned people, who by their very presence, destroy the future they want to preserve. Tragedy is a Master that enjoys its own reason.

There is ludic ironic justice in that even the monkeys are fighting back. Three attacked tourists last year to get food. Is this a piece of the Real in Lacanian terms within the image of "guerrilla-monkeys" fighting back? Lacan reminds us that only in the Imaginary is *contra-diction* possible. "Guerrilla monkeys" is a possibility that gives the

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[6] Doane (1991) contrasts this to the cold, alpine and northern climates where without a map one dies.

hysteric some hope? Saving the rainforest has become a discursive "media event." As Fiske (1996) reminds us, "media events are sites of maximum visibility and maximum turbulence" where clarity is difficult if not impossible" (p. 7). Or as Žižek (1994) indicates of the impossibility of communication: there is simultaneously not enough and too much communication in a world where contact is seen in a "by-product" of the late capitalist project to reveal the phantasmatic quality of real life (p. 210). In the virtual 'forest of desires' of *Supermodels in the Rainforest* my students and I were in the confluence of discursive currents where desires are signified in relation to each other's "monstrous distortions" (p. 210). Following from Bakhtin (1986), I import the construal of meaning in the Symbolic "structured in difference." Much as a satellite photo of a tributary joining a river, one notices the variation of water colour, salinity, temperature difference within a range of sensory registers: sight, touch and taste.

Rainforest works as a polysemic text in its capacity to play not only along the dialogic axes of *natural-technology*, *preservation-destruction*, but more importantly in its ability to create the phantasm of presence by keeping the transcendental Phallus moving between the types of discourse that Bakhtin sees as generated a text "structured in difference." Given the wide range of responses from my students, it is evident that are powerful eddies and undercurrents work through this polysemic text.

The chart below illustrates how the video works to create the discursive effects of drawing together centripetal trajectories or discursive currents of madness with idiolect, internally persuasive and authoritative discourses. In various cells I will offer samples of student comments about the film that complete the rubric.

CROSS-READING THE DISCURSIVE FIELDS OF BAKHTIN AND LACAN

TYPE OF DISCOURSE (BAKHTIN)	Authoritative	Internally persuasive	Idiolect	Discourse of madness (autolect)
SOCIAL EFFECTS	CENTRIPETAL	consensus	dissensus	CENTRIFUGAL
VISUAL ECONOMY	Invisible (the gaze)	Transparency (the look)	Uncanny	Grotesque
SOURCE	the Big Other (the Father of Enjoyment)	Interpellated subjects	feminine undecidability	Absolute otherness (does not lack)
LACANIAN REGISTER	Veiled Phallus	Symbolic	Imaginary	Real
EXEMPLAR FROM *SUPERMODELS*	the gaze (scopophlia: operation of the camera)	Frederique's monologue	dance sequences, Mr. Dumma's alterity	interview with rainforest guide

Authoritative Discourse

Both and females students remarked that the film was "way too cheesy" and "an obvious ploy to make money, not save the rainforest." As one student asked rhetorically, "Can they expect a few bucks made from the video to make any difference?" Consistently students turned against the authoritative discourse of the video and rejected its call to help the rainforest. "So I like nice breasts and send some jerk money for the video. What's he gonna do with the money – bribe government officials?" The students' comments raised the issue of context and location alluded to earlier. The video seems to be shot in a generic rainforest, located in no country in particular.

Internally Persuasive

Students reacted very little to the statement made by the models, more so to the factoids provided by the narrator. Student expressed dismay and frustration with the voiced over text that made the situation "seem so hopeless" in one student's view. Another asked, "Fight for the rainforest? What is that supposed to mean?" Students were persuaded by the statistical evidence provided but consistently found the shots of rainforest destruction "made them sad." I was struck by several students' comments that the "statistics made me sad, the pictures made me angry."

Idiolect

Students were generally confused by the dance sequences and posed calendar shots. One female student commented that the video was a nothing more than a "*Babewatch* in a jungle movie." Others saw the dancing as a "good way to hold people's attention." The dancing continued to disrupt students' reading of the video. "Just when I thought they were making a point some babe would pop up and prance around," complained one female student. Not surprisingly, what remained a recurring student comment was that the cameras seemed to spend more time on the models then on "the problem." What remains problematic throughout the video is that the possessing gaze of the male subject is never dismantled. Despite the claims by a few students that the dancing was "really art" few others were convinced.

Discourse of Madness

As the students remarked, there were moments in the film when "it all came together", and others that seemed "just plain bizarre." Several students remarked that the rainforest guide (Mr. Dumma) seemed "fake, like he was trying to be a native," while others said "he was too real to be faking." When Mr. Dumma says, "You can fool me in the city, I don't respect no man in the jungle" several students thought this was "silly macho stuff."

Many students said the dance sequences were totally "out of place" and "grotesque." Consider one female student's sarcastic comment, "Like I would go into a village of poor people and dance around in a two hundred dollar swimsuit…right?" The linkage between the dance performances and what they signified were widely variant among the students. It is problematic to suggest then that the dances as signifiers were quilted with the signified through the Phallus to create a presence of artistic creation or scopic pleasure for students.

For Lacan, the *copula* created between the signifier and signified is the Phallus. The Phallus is the *is* or being attributed to a thing (Oliver, 1995, p. 75). If that is the case, then Fiske is right is asserting that the operation of the gaze is not something that exists in a vacuum, that in all discursive activity a river of meanings runs through. I cannot help but wonder if the Phallus fails in the video precisely because it fails to veil itself. As Lacan (1977) reminds us, the Phallus is most effective when it is veiled (p. 288). As long as the video contained its authoritative discourse behind the diegetic narration and the visual registry of the rainforest panoramas, students found the video "quite interesting and fun to watch." But as the dance sequences and interviews with 'natives' continued, students generally could not invest in the discourses of the idiolect and madness.

Invigorating the Plurality of the Phallus: Textual Poaching

There was a space within *Supermodels* for a tactical response by students. Having had some exposure in the past to the strategies of the *Adbusters* campaign, students in my class were familiar with the strategies of "spoof ads" and "ad wars" promoted by the *Adbusters* organization based in Vancouver and featured in the magazine of the same name [illegible]ure jamming" has been a strategy I have used with students to support position papers and debates on a variety of public policy issues.

Jenkins' (1992) work on textual poaching offers teachers the opportunity to explore the "affective investments" (Grossberg, 1992) of both themselves and students. Appropriating de Certeau's deployment of poaching as the tactic of the "nomad" (who does not have access to the productive forces of media production), poaching interrogates modernist assumptions of *authorship* and *reception*. While Jenkins clearly locates poaching within fandom, there is no reason why the tactics of the "nomad" cannot be used by students to interrogate their affective investments in popular culture. So while most students found the *Supermodels* video problematic, textual poaching offered specific techniques for accomplishing the central project of media studies, to encourage students to act as an activated audience in viewing the *Supermodels* video images and texts and "adapt these materials and weave them back into their everyday lives" (Jenkins, 1992, p. 40). Drawing on Jenkins' work I examined with the students how textual poaching could be used as a means to "talk back to" the *Supermodels* video.

I adopted the stance taken from Fiske (1987) that *Supermodels* contains an "excess of meaning." From Fiske's appropriation of de Certeau and the application he makes of Bakhtin's sense of "carnival and style," I offered students the opportunity to discus how the video played on signifiers such as the *fashion industry* and *celebrity status*.[7]

The steps that I suggested for students were drawn from Jenkins' strategies of "scribbling in the margins" where students write themselves into the text through recontextualizations, refocalizations and eight other textual reworkings (see Jenkins, 1992, pp. 162-177). *Recontextualization* involves writing in missing scenes or vignettes to extend the possibility of the action or characters carrying on outside of the offered text. One example was a student who described a story of one of the supermodels travelling to this town to "save our stinky sad little town from the pulp mill." Refocalizations included shifting the emphasis of the text away from the main characters (the supermodels) to the peasants who were only marginally featured in the video. Two students wrote "letters to friends" in a sort of resistant ventriloquism about the "visit of the stupermodels [*sic*] to our village." Some of these pieces were quite imaginative. One student wrote:

> So after two days here the models were so sick of being eaten by the bugs that they were going crazy. Mind you they never stayed out of their trailers very long. The best part was them giving us money to stand in photographs with them, to laugh and sing when the camera was filming.

Cross-overs were the most commonly used strategy by students. Loosely defined, cross-overs involve locating the characters in another story or context. Initially I thought the students would find this the most difficult, but soon it became apparent that this strategy would be the most enjoyable for many of them. By putting the supermodels into circulation in other texts, primarily advertisements, students found ways to locate the underlying commercialization of the video. As several students remarked, "the message of the video is beauty sells, so why not make this really obvious?" Of the class of 24 students, 14 chose this approach (12 females, 2 males).

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[7] Students were given the opportunity to critique or support the video by offering a response to it by drawing on magazines, television or other media sources.

For Fiske (1987), tactics within the contradictory pleasures of the "carnivalesque" is the way that ideology works through the *signifieds* and *subjectivity* to mediate meanings produced in culture. What quickly became apparent in the students' work was their capacity and interest for reworking the *Supermodel* motif with intersections from other locations in print media such as advertisements for cosmetics and 'beauty products'. Female students engaged these opportunities more than male students. Several students echoed the comment by one student, Jamie, that "these are women that work hard at being seen a certain way. I like doing that sometimes too but I know in the end it is just a game. So why not have some fun with this?" Jamie's ad, "Don't Cry for me Costa Rica" was, as she explained, "something that popped out at me when I saw an ad for *Maybelline* eye shadow." Although Jamie found the video "rather crazy," she thought "the message was really good." She explained her use of the *Maybelline* product in her ad, "so even though I use this stuff, I realize it is just as much fun as parading around in a video like this." In late capitalism, the subject is neither the coherent cherub of reason nor the devil child of chaos, but perhaps an amalgam of the two.

Fiske (1987) proposed, in *Television Culture*, a threading of pleasure through the fabric of cultural meaning-making. Yet, for Fiske, an alternative semiotic of resistance is derived through a carnivalesque expression of the force of experience outside the dominant ideology. Both for Fiske (1987) and McLaren (1995) in late capitalism, *leisure displaces labour*, *consumption displaces production* and *commodities* become the instruments of leisure. Sarah takes up this challenge by parodying the models. Sarah's ad plays the *Nike* invocation to "Just do it" against the image of one of the models "posing as some sort of explorer." The models are draped inside a boat with their feelings hanging out – they are wearing expensive sneakers while poor shoeless children watch from the beach. As Sarah indicated, "I noticed the boat was in less than a foot of water and the whole thing looked so fake."

Two male students produced rather clever "cross-over" responses. "Extinction is forever, your beauty isn't…Be a Revlon Girl" was Mark's attempt to "show how trivial the whole thing is – being a supermodel and makeup and stuff." His explanation to the class raised some eyebrows and a few questions from female students. One challenged him, "Why do you say everything about make-up is trivial?"

Laurie made her poster as a cross-over to a *Gillette Sensor Excel* advertisement, showing the supermodels shaving their legs in the river with piranhas close by. The ad read, "A cut that won't ever bleed," gesturing to the safety of the razor with the voracious fish nearby. She had some trouble explaining her intention to the class. "Are you for or against the video?", students asked. She claimed that "my ad is just making fun of the whole deal, you know."

In opposition to critics of the more ludic tendencies of postmodernism, such as Hall (see Turner, 1990, p. 211), I find solace in the labyrinth of images and discursive moves that is our home in the classroom. Comments like Laurie's demonstrate how the tactics of the nomad in the everyday culture of the classroom can go beyond postmodernism's inability to construct "conscientious skepticism" (Turner, 1990, p. 209). Students engaged the video and the textual poaching opportunities from a multiplicity of locations. Against Ben's effort to "not take things so seriously" was Sandra, who had a tear in her eyes when she was explaining her poster to the class. She was especially struck by a billboard she saw in town that advertised Caterpillar Tractors with the slogan, "There are no easy answers, only intelligent solutions." Active in the school's recycling program and the SPCA chapter in the community, Sandra worked several hours on her poster. "When I saw the image of the peasants trying to stop the bulldozer in the video, I knew right then what I was going to do for a poster."

Consider Sandra's comment to the class about her poster

> What really upset me watching the video was how the animals were being hurt too. So I just had to put that image of the monkey in my ad to make this point. Kind of a ghost the way he turned out. I thought that was the best part of how my poster turned out.

Against the modernist discourse enamored with the possibility of propelling a critical eye(I) that will critique our own identifications and desires to save the planet, I must, as a teacher, consider the opening quote that draws from Derrida's (1993) caution against having "hard dry eyes." It wasn't possible to watch Sandra's discomfort explaining her poster to the class. But then there was laughter with Laurie's presentation.

There is a quip that "postmodernism is nihilism without tears." I resist such a dismissal of an intellectual impulse that brings students to a location in their own lives where they can see the simultaneity of hope and despair. I am reminded of Carly's playful ironizing of the *Duran Duran* lyrics to the song "Come Undone" (cited earlier). As Carly explained to the class, "This used to be my favourite song, but now it seems so dumb." Carly re-wrote the lyrics in a caustic critique:

> Title: *Supermodel Undone*
>
> Mine, unbelievable dream made of
> dollars and cents,
> I've been waiting for it. Signed by my own hand.
> Congratulations, I thought were in order.
> (Can't ever keep from going out of the spotlight,
> Can't believe your taking my contract away.)
> Chorus:
> Who do you call, who do you blame, when you don't
> get signed...
> Wish I could get lost in a camera filled room,
> everything will be all right if I could just sign a contract now.

Clearly students like Carly had no difficulty problematizing the participation of the supermodels in this video, although as one student suggested, "Who are we to judge them? We would do the same...make money any way we could." A male student asked, "But how do we know they did this for money? We should find out before we judge." Generally the female students saw the issue of "being paid" as irrelevant. "The real issue is what kind of message this is sending to people," complained a student in frustration.

On a more critical level, how realistic is it to expect students to interrogate the sites of their own "affective investments" and attachments (Grossberg, 1992) in terms of the hegemonic practices of late capitalism?

Given the wide range of response from students, I was convinced more than ever that there is no singular reception of text. While dominant readings are certainly offered, these can be resisted and/or worked to contradict and fold into themselves. Again, Bakhtin's notion of centripetal forces works well to describe this process. I argue however, that the introduction of textual poaching creates an even greater degree of centripetal forces into the mediation of texts that allows for the production of responses that allow students to repopulate signifiers with their own desires.

Textbooks and documentary films circulate the Cartesian cogito of the "dry eyes of Reason."

> Derrida insists that Aristotle's distinction between animals with "hard dry eyes" and those that have eyelids and can blink, is a way to interrogate our privileging of the "representational man." This figure is a masculine coded image – one who is endowed "with hard eyes permanently open to a nature that he is to dominate, to rape if necessary, by fixing it (Nature) in front of him, or in swooping down on it like a bird of prey" (as cited in Jay, 1994, p. 514).

Using polysemic such as *Supermodels* allows for what Jay (1994) calls for: using the eye as a source of disruptive energy – "*l'oeil, c'est la force*" (Jay, p. 565).

I am aware as well of the effects of the particular technologies used to read and react to the *Supermodels* video. Our school provides students with the agency to respond to media in a variety of modalities. There were numerous examples of digitized scanning and image management technology that not all students have access to and feel comfortable with. I have encouraged students to become adept at using a wide variety of these technologies but not to privilege them over textual or other responses. There is, in Fiske's (1996) description of video production *video low* and *video high*, an interesting question in my work with students in terms of different levels of "videotech" that circulate within my classroom and the students' work (pp. 220-225). Space does not permit me to pursue the issues surrounding technological sophistication and discursive constructions of legitimacy, all I wish to do is point to Fiske's theme of "technostruggles" as a marker for the contestation that will intersect technical progress with human agency in the years to come.

There is no doubt in my mind about the agency that digitized scanning and image management allowed students. Computer technologies acted as a catalyst for their engagement of the mediascape on a more level technological 'playing field'. Both technically and socially, our teacher-student relation was a *reciprocal incitation* and struggle that draws on Foucault's (1979) sense of *power* and *knowledge* existing as correlatives that exist together to provide the constituents of what became possible for us as activated readers of the *Supermodels* video.

As Foucault (1979) suggests, "power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted arrangements of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up" (p. 202).

Yet, Foucault fails to underscore the centrality of desire in the circulation of signifiers. Fiske (1993) is partly right when he claims that the issue about Foucault's 'disciplined docile bodies' is not so much about *what gets decided* to be normalized, as in speech and dress, but *who gets to decide* what is normalized (p. 62). Lacan would take it one step further. Whose desire and hopes are articulated? Whose are repressed? What is the specular economy that produce such psychic investments? In a small way, textual poaching the *Supermodels* video gave students the opportunity to engage the range of discourses embedded in *Supermodels* while making meaning for themselves. What the students produced is not resistance, Fiske (1993) would say, but the "desire to control one's immediate condition" (p. 78).

Poaching as Returning the Gaze?

After all is said, what is done? In working with students I am the I/eye that writes in their place. I am privileged in this paper by having the role of the narrator. How have my interests in media and cultural studies framed this text? There remains Martin Jay's (1994) reminder that human eyes always *convey* and *deploy* human interest (p. 401). In a Lacanian reading, *the gaze looks/works both ways.*

Critical theorists remind us that human interests about truth, rightness and authenticity need to be claimed and struggled for intersubjectively in a community of others who treat each *other* as "equal interlocutors." I would add to this ethic, the need to respect the "imprecation of the eye in the flesh of the world" (Jay, 1994, p. 401) and the orders of the visible and sayable. For together, they dialectically produce enabling possibilities for resistance and agency. Simply, I cannot detach myself from desire.

I am reminded as a researcher that I have a produced a text within the economy of a male gaze and that students viewed the video in a school setting. They were being watched watching. [8] I have tried to mindful of the illusion that I cannot achieve transparency – that the *eye/I* of the researcher seduces one to imagine, perhaps narcissistically, autonomous coherent selves who act as if they are achieved subjects. The tensions and conflicts that the students encounter everyday in school had real place in the work we did. Several students thought the *Supermodels* video was "really dumb" and they simply "threw something together to hand in." *Who* is then the researcher?

We need to restore our ability to caress the unknown, to touch the world, as Levinas as suggested, "keeping the eyes shut, thwarting the violent avidity of the gaze" (as cited in Jay, 1994, p. 556). In a small way, textual poaching has given students an opportunity to return the avidity of the male gaze. There is both refusal and acceptance in the student responses, both engagement and ambivalence. Culture is like this too.

What Of My Symptoms?

It is axiomatic that in cultural criticism that employs psychoanalysis the central project for the teacher in working with students is working through the chasm of desires that flow within conflicting discourses. Recalling Lacan's four discourse of cultural criticism (the discourses of the University, Analyst, Hysteric, and Master) it is clear that all modes of signification act to valorize and repress different factors of psychic life (knowledge production, ideals, self-division, and jouissance) (Bracher, 1993, p. 53). What I have applied so far in my reading of *Supermodels* slides in-between the discourses of the University and the Analyst, all veiled perhaps by the master signifiers of cultural criticism and media literacy (I stand again in danger of creating a new discourse of the

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[8] I would need to investigate the contexts that make-up the everyday practices of my teaching, the classroom, and the students' lives (Morley & Robins, 1995, p. 173). As Morley and Robins suggests, television viewing is normally done at home. Further work needs to be done on the influences of public settings (classrooms, bars, restaurants) where television viewing is increasingly taking hold. In many ways, we need to understand the possibility that television viewing is "domesticated" in the home (p. 182). This raises the possibility for teachers to understand how television viewing may be "schooled" or mediated by the artifice of institutional settings. As one male student moaned, "Why can't the video just be for fun? Why do we have to do school work on it?"

Master). Drawing on the analytical tools of the university, I have attempted to construct my analysis around systems of knowledge. The tropes of humanities scholarship and scholarly footnotes are exemplars of this discursive move in this chapter. I stand mindful of Bracher's (1993) caution that cultural criticism should produce social change, not simply produce more knowledge (pp. 78-80). Empowering students and myself to act *more responsibly* was a project caught up in the return of *objet a* as our jouissance spilled out from of our working with the polysemic text of the *Supermodels* video.

In other ways I have appropriated the discourse of the Master as I deploy criticisms of eco-tourism as a twisted form of capitalism, as I play the game of cultural critic who just might know how to save the rainforest and make the world and protect supermodels from their own destructive tendencies. I remain embroiled in the discourse of the Hysteric, where I am unable to produce my own master signifiers that help me work through the lures of the *Supermodels* video. I am doubly hystericized by having to present this chapter as a coherent text that might give the master signifier to the other, to the reader.

In *Seminar III* Lacan argues that all human knowledge is tied to paranoia, a helpful caution when engaged in teaching. All seeking is hiding; all hiding is seeking. The *fort da* game returns as the gaze as a love object. So here I am given the task of reading Lacan (1993) within "the dialectic of jealousy" to get things right, which is the "primordial manifestation of communication" (p. 39). What follows is a shuttling back and forth between three quotes from Lacan. "When we see ourselves we see only a look. We do not get nearer to what we are. The mirror image is back to front" (as cited in Sarup, 1989, pp. 14-15).

Lacan's reading of phenomenology influenced his work as a psychiatrist. Merleau-Ponty reminded him that consciousness is not an object but an attempt to piece together a set of incoherent desires. The 'map of I' extends as far as I can reach, but I can only reach as far as I can see. Meaning and apprehension are melded by the act of "mimicry;" we are captured in the image outside of ourselves. This capacity to image-in (imagine) forms the basis for Lacan's (1996) *Imaginary* register; the specular relationship the child constructs with the visual field of sensings. My *Ideal Ego* is the place I see for myself (the look), while the *Ego Ideal* is the place from which I look. "The Ego is what puts the Subject aside" (Lacan as cited in Feldstein, 1996, p. 41).

Again, *tragedy is a Master that enjoys its own reason.* The hysteric enjoys no reason. The hysterical symptom lies in the dream, in the Imaginary where contradiction is not possible. Thus I am lured, as were some of my students, to the supermodels as they work through the polysemic text of the video in the four discursive registers as Bakhtin (1984) described earlier.[9]

As I think back over the students' comments on the film I sense the contradictions that drew me to have students critique and work with this video as a potential learning resource. The hysteric "is always absent at the right moment" (Soler, 1996, p. 269). The hysteric refuses or fails the jouissance of the Other. This refusal is driven by the hysteric's return in the body, where subjectivity is buried in the unassimilabities of the Other.[10] To a degree textual poaching allows a movement toward the inassimilable space without lapsing into presence or a belief that 'one has got it right'.

What of the pedagogical appropriateness of the video in the classroom? Why do bring such an incommensurable set of teaching practices forward for scrutiny? The hysteric reminds the obsessive part of me that that there is no object (signifier) that is capable of plugging up (w)hole of desire. As with the look of the subject directed ahead toward the world, the object cause is always behind. While lack produces the vector of desire, the object of desire invariably brought through to the individuated subject through castration is imagined to be ahead in the look but is in fact behind in the form of the gaze. *Objet a* is the equivalency of castration, where the subject of speech is the object that is posed for the subject, but one that is refused. For me the *Supermodels* video presents the "cruel symptoms" I have, as both the hysteric and obsessive, caught in the fact that desire cannot make the lack disappear (Soler, 1996, p. 257).

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[9] I am an obsessive, drawn as I am to write these lines and register my complaint within the Symbolic code of the analyst's discourse that I have appropriated. That is the difference between seeing me as an hysteric or obsessive. Both are neurotic symptoms of the same cause. The hysteric plays out his refuge in the Imaginary, the obsessive in the Symbolic. Slips of the tongue, dreams and other processes that live close to the unconscious are for the hysteric. The hysteric is constantly unsatisfied since there are no signifiers for his jouissance. The obsessive sees his desires as impossible; he is lost in thought and tries to be the master of his desire through too much thinking. The hysteric, on the other hand, talks too much (Soler, 1996, pp. 263-266.

I remain obsessed by my own inability to finish what I have started. This is the problem for the obsessive "who plugs the lack with signifiers" (Soler, 1996, p. 270). The mirror of this page reminds me that I am the reflexive split between my (narcissistic) vision and the (in)capacity of my grasp to shape the objects of the world into that image. The word, my text, is never adequate for the thing: a demand, a repetition, a look, that can never (over)come what it aims at. What I look at is not there.

[10] I follow again Levinas' (1984) ethical call taken up in the previous chapter, to acknowledge the radical alterity of the other.

An Epi-log

> For that which I am doing, I do not understand; for I am not practicing what I would like to do, but I am doing the very thing I hate. But if I do the very thing I do not wish to do, I agree with the Law, confessing that is the good.
>
> Romans. 8: 15-16

So the Master speaks.

> For I know that nothing good dwells in me , that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. For the good that I wish, I do not do; but I practice the very evil that I do not wish.
>
> Romans. 8: 18-20

So the lured eye(I) speaks.

There can be no refusal for desire. *Supermodels in the Rainforest* is a palimpsest of my *excess* and *gratuity* (the response to the Father) of an ego and a world that is guilty of burning in its guilt. We live in the gaze of the big Other that resulted from the trauma we experience from the loss of innocence.[11] "The world on the brink of disaster" gestures towards the plentitude of the Real. We have been evicted, chased from the Garden of Eden, out to the unmapped torrid zones of the rainforest from where the *Thing* will come at us.

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[11] The big Other, the Symbolic Order, has no ultimate signifier that guarantees its own consistency (Žižek, 1994b, p. 172). Perhaps this is no more apparent when teachers like myself present students with the possibility that 'Nature will be destroyed by man'. The end of life as we know it was a common threat in the 1980s as the threat of nuclear annihilation seemed imminent. In both instances, students are robbed of jouissance. A possible recovery of jouissance can be perhaps seen in the remark by one student who felt that we would eventually destroy ourselves, but that he would still be happy to recycle because it reminded him of when he was a kid and "I was a lot happier when I believed in Nature and Santa Claus…. It just feels good." As sad as it was for me to hear this comment, it is instructive. Here we see *jouis-sense*, enjoymeant: the sheer self-consuming enjoyment of doing something eclipses the repressed knowledge that the master signifiers of environmental discourses are void of content (Žižek, 1994b, p. 156).

Perhaps there is no point in trying to save *Nature*, since *Nature*'s jouissance is unmappable. Perhaps all we have is our own jouissance. Maybe social studies and the discourse of the University that it carries cannot save the world. Perhaps all we have is living through the trouble to so. For many students, the rational arguments do not motivate them to act.[12] I too, at times, am overwhelmed by my own imbecility. What, if anything, do I know of the *global warming*, *ecology* and *the future*. These signifiers and my own neurotic attachments to them seem to be an endless stream in the social studies curricula. *History* and *the future* are signifiers that are hard to swallow. Anxiety is anticipation that does not know its object. Perhaps that is why students are overwhelmed at times.

> If a lifetime is the thickness of a page, then time would be an encyclopedia 70 miles thick (John Sherba, of the Kronos Quartet, in an interview in *Utne Reader*, pp. 102-103, January-February, 1997).

I remain a thin remnant touched by the Real. One of my student's parents was a geologist who had just returned from Costa Rica. He was promoting a World Wildlife Fund project to rehabilitate deforested land and protect virgin forests by turning the areas into parkland. To promote the project he brought in slides and some mounted insects to show the students. A particularly exotic insect captivated several students. One student who was usually quite quiet could not contain his enthusiasm as he blurted out, "This shit is much too weird." That single little bug (a piece of *objet a*) enthralled the class much more so than did the *Supermodels* video.

Both that one little bug and a single page of the encyclopedia stretch beyond our ability to read 'all of knowledge' are metonyms for where our agency and possibilities for social change appear. Even if we could teach students all of the knowledge we had in the Symbolic, they would still lack. Yet a single leaf carries with it a piece of the Real that invigorated and brought hope to the class. The class did take part in a campaign to save Cost Rican rainforest. Despite the concerns raised earlier about the impact of tourism on Costa Rica, the student remained committed to a major fund-raising project. As one student suggested, "We need to start somewhere – this beats the alternative – letting everything fall apart." The class did raise $600 and were able to 'purchase' several hundred acres of park reserve.

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[12] As one of my students suggested, "All this environmental scare stuff doesn't make sense. If we are so

Perhaps this project, this one little act, was a response to the *Duran Duran* lyric:

> Who do you need, who do you love
> When you come undone?

It is axiomatic in cultural criticism that employs psychoanalysis that the central project for the teacher in working with students is working through the chiasma of desires that flow within conflicting symbolic representations of a world that seems increasingly inassimilable. Like Darja Lingenberg, who "wants to be beautiful for a purpose," both my students and myself want to learn for a purpose. In between *desire* (amidst the paradoxical forms of late capitalism) and *prohibition* (my forbidden erotic attachments to video) emerged our jouissance.

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stupid then why are we smart enough to know we are so stupid?"

Chapter 7

Passing Subjects: Accountability and the Gaze

What are the particular signifying mechanisms at work in the increasing emphasis placed on external testing of students? Whose desires and anxieties are being privileged by the growing impulse to scrutinize our students' learning?

Whose are being foreclosed? It is the central argument of this chapter that the productive power of the Phallus can be construed within the breakthroughs made in the theoretical understandings of autopoiesis. As with previous chapters, I take up the Lacanian problematization of *the subject of the gaze* that draws into question the Cartesian assumptions about the coherent self who looks as a neutral observer on the writings of students. Within the Symbolic, how does the move towards educational accountability illustrate the qualities of an autopoietic[1] system in its project to incite teachers to communicate as subjects within the gaze of the big Other? In particular, what is the role of the vanishing mediator[2] in the exchange of looks and gazes that are produced in a centralized examination program where teachers act themselves as 'specular selves', subjects of the Ideal Ego. This chapter will examine the work of teachers like myself who participate in the process of test development, standard-setting, and marking of the Social Studies 30 Diploma Examination in Alberta, Canada.

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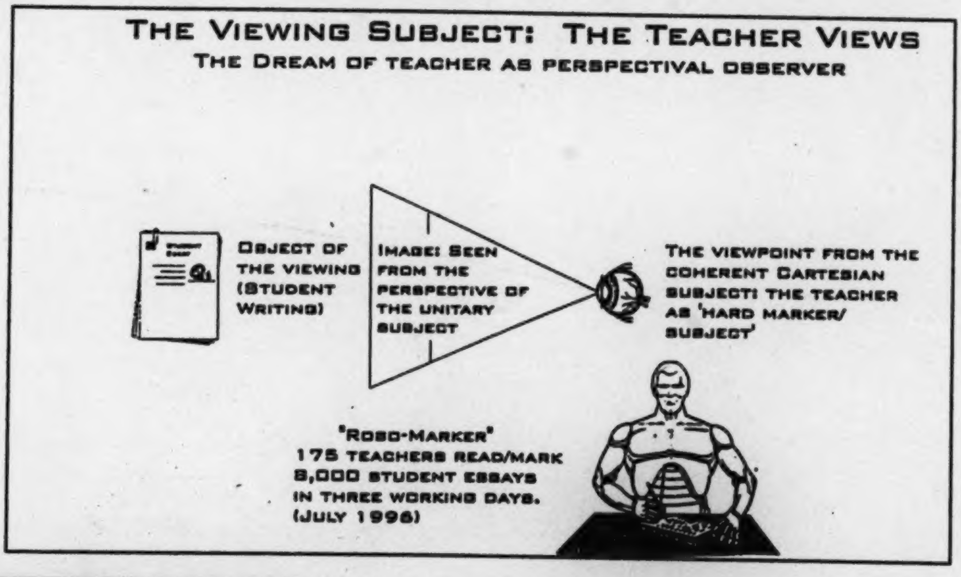
[1] "A symbolic order involves the structure of the hermeneutic circle: it is by definition 'autopoietic' and all-encompassing, as such it no externality" (Žižek, 1996, 146).

[2] A term Žižek draws from Jameson. I use the term here to refer to inter-subjective investment in an economy of signifiers that takes on authority and a spectral materiality in the psyche. I will develop this concept further in Figure 3 of this chapter. A possible analogy here is to imagine a game one might play with a room full of people (Žižek, 1998, 253). The point of the game is rather simple. Someone will reveal a dream to the group but before doing so a 'detective' will leave the room. The detective's task, upon returning to the group, is to guess the identity of the dreamer by asking questions that can be answered with 'yes' or 'no'. However the real 'trick' is that there is no dream. After the detective leaves the room, the group is told to answer 'yes' or 'no' to the questions based on some completely arbitrary criteria such as 'yes' whenever the second word in the question has two syllables. What happens upon the return of the detective is quite interesting usually. The detective constructs an elaborate dream narrative cued by the prompts by the group. From the bricolage emerges a narrative that is contingent on the experience of the detective and the arbitrary choice of words he uses to ask questions. There is no author as such. A narrative of a dream is constructed by the 'invisible presence' in the room (the second word of the detective's question being one or two syllables). The form of the narrative (S2) lacks a master signifier (a truth) that the detective can button down. There is, in the end, a *no-thing* in the center of the dream that acts as a vanishing mediator.

I have mapped out the problematics of the *gaze* and *look* in the diagrammatic representations in previous chapters. What follows is a diagrammatic overview of the assessment processes of the Alberta Education Diploma Examination Program.

The testing Program involves students writing a three-hour examination consisting of 70 multiple choice questions and one essay. The examinations are returned to one central location, quite appropriately to the provincial capital, Edmonton, Alberta. The essay portion is assessed by three readers, all of who are practicing teachers who are brought in to mark examinations. The three scores assigned to the essays are averaged and then combined with the multiple choice section.[3] Teacher-markers are trained to grade student papers on a five point scale that is described later in this chapter (see chart Diploma Examination Marking Comparison, p. 104 – 105). These training sessions are critical since the papers teacher-markers are given to train on are discussed at a table with five or six other markers. The exchange of views is critical in reducing what are called "discrepant papers" (papers whose grade deviate significantly from marker to marker).

Figure 1


THE VIEWING SUBJECT: THE TEACHER VIEWS
THE DREAM OF TEACHER AS PERSPECTIVAL OBSERVER
OBJECT OF THE VIEWING (STUDENT WRITING)
IMAGE: SEEN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE UNITARY SUBJECT
THE VIEWPOINT FROM THE COHERENT CARTESIAN SUBJECT: THE TEACHER AS 'HARD MARKER/ SUBJECT'
'ROBO-MARKER'
175 TEACHERS READ/MARK 8,000 STUDENT ESSAYS IN THREE WORKING DAYS. (JULY 1996)

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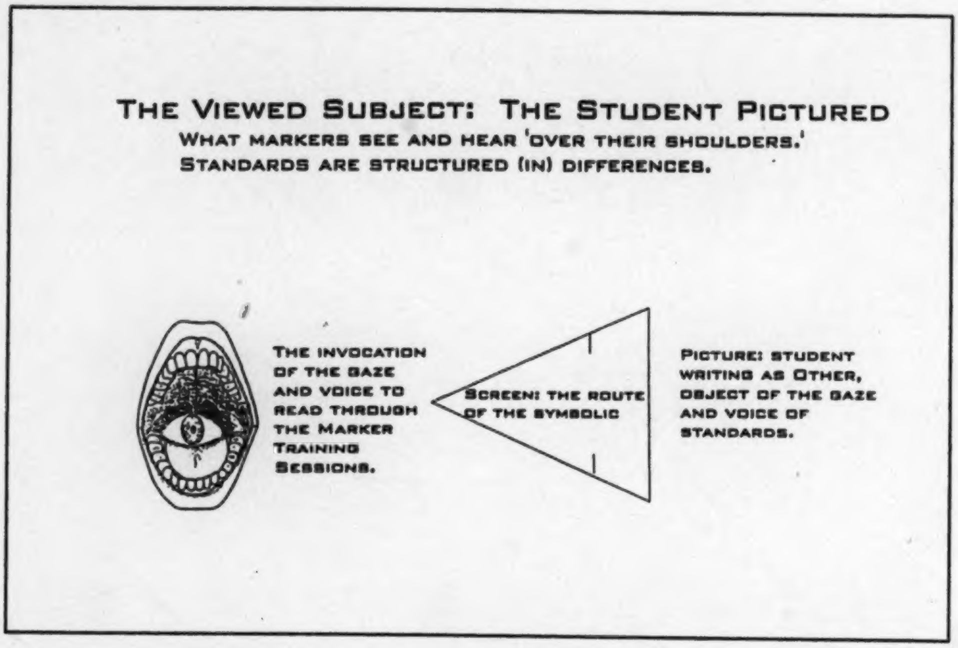
[3] The multiple choice section is worth 70 points, the essay section 30 points. The total mark represents 50 percent of the student's final grade in the subject.

In Figure 1, I see the training session as the invocation of the gaze construed by discussion of the sample papers. In Figure 2, I illustrate the subjective position of the teacher marker in relation to the marking process and the student essay.

Figure 2


THE VIEWED SUBJECT: THE STUDENT PICTURED
WHAT MARKERS SEE AND HEAR 'OVER THEIR SHOULDERS.'
STANDARDS ARE STRUCTURED (IN) DIFFERENCES.
THE INVOCATION OF THE GAZE AND VOICE TO READ THROUGH THE MARKER TRAINING SESSIONS.
SCREEN: THE ROUTE OF THE SYMBOLIC
PICTURE: STUDENT WRITING AS OTHER, OBJECT OF THE GAZE AND VOICE OF STANDARDS.

External testing has become *a point de capiton*, the capture of the multiple forms of representation that students deploy in making meaning of the world of Social Studies 30. The insertion of master signifiers into the forms of living that is public education acts as a brokering of the Imaginary and the Real mapped out into the Symbolic (Feldstein, 1996, p. 51). As Foucault (1979) suggests, "power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted arrangements of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up" (p. 202).

Lacan (1979) describes praxis as "a concerted human action, whatever it may be, which places us in a position to treat the Real by the Symbolic" (p.6). Treating the Real through the symbolic in educational praxis does indeed call teachers "to answer for the exaction" (p. 6). But if Lacan is correct; the only exaction possible for teachers is the permanent flight from negation: the negation of their passage from Subject to Predicate – into the classroom which is the backdrop where the Diploma Examinations remain a "vanishing mediator" (Žižek, 1995, p. 34).

By extending Lacan's interrogation of the question, *who is the subject of the gaze*? into the arena of autopoietics, I argue that the Diploma Examination Program activates the construction of teacher identity through its parsing out of *individuated looks* across the range of student essay responses. By reading the Alberta Education marker training sessions and the process of marking student work against a Foucauldian "compulsion to communicate," I argue that the avidity of the gaze should not be mistaken for the impulse to control or suture students into an panoptic realm, but rather as a means of securing the integrity of the Lacanian Symbolic order as it is continually challenged by the centrifugal forces of the Imaginary. By appropriating Bakhtin's (1984) reading of the centrifugal and centripetal effects of language, I will examine student writing in terms of how autopoietic systems reflexively re-integrate themselves.

I feel that the current move towards authentic assessment and the identification of transparent 'student outcomes' is a transmutation of the Symbolic Order's capacity to keep circulating the very thing it does not possess – the Phallus. As an autopoietic system, the Diploma Examination program is able to reflexively construct itself around what Palmer (1997) calls the "heterodynamic projection of the world as a social ecstasy" (p. 67).

In the fall of 1996, as a classroom teacher who had taught Social Studies 30 for 18 years, I contacted Alberta Education and obtained permission to review the test scores assigned to students who wrote the essay response section of the June 1996 examination. Students had three hours to complete the examination that includes 70 multiple choice questions and one essay selected from two choices. The June 1996 examination offered these two questions:

> 1. Should governments today play a greater role in the operation of their economies?
> 2. To what extent is the promotion of nationalism a positive force for achieving international stability?

To make the textual analysis of the student essays manageable I randomly selected 24 students who had written the second question. I chose this question simply because most students from my two classes wrote this essay. It was my intention to read and re-score the student written responses in order to identify differences between my marks and the marks assigned by the Alberta Education markers. Student scores were compared on four scoring dimensions: Exploration of the Issue, Defence of Position, Quality of Examples, Quality of Language and Expression. With students' permission, in February 1997, Student Evaluation pulled from their archives the 24 examinations I requested.

The eight month period that had lapsed since students wrote the examinations was helpful in that I would not prejudge my scores with any recollections of how I had read student report forms that arrived in my school in the fall of 1996. I deliberately avoided reading these reports so as not to influence my scoring of the student papers. Each paper was marked twice: a first reading in the first week of March, a second in mid-March. I averaged my two marks on each of the four dimensions of the Scoring Guide (see table below for a listing of these dimensions). Since Alberta Education gives two readings to student papers, I thought it only sensible to compare my average marks based on two readings to their average marks based on two readings.

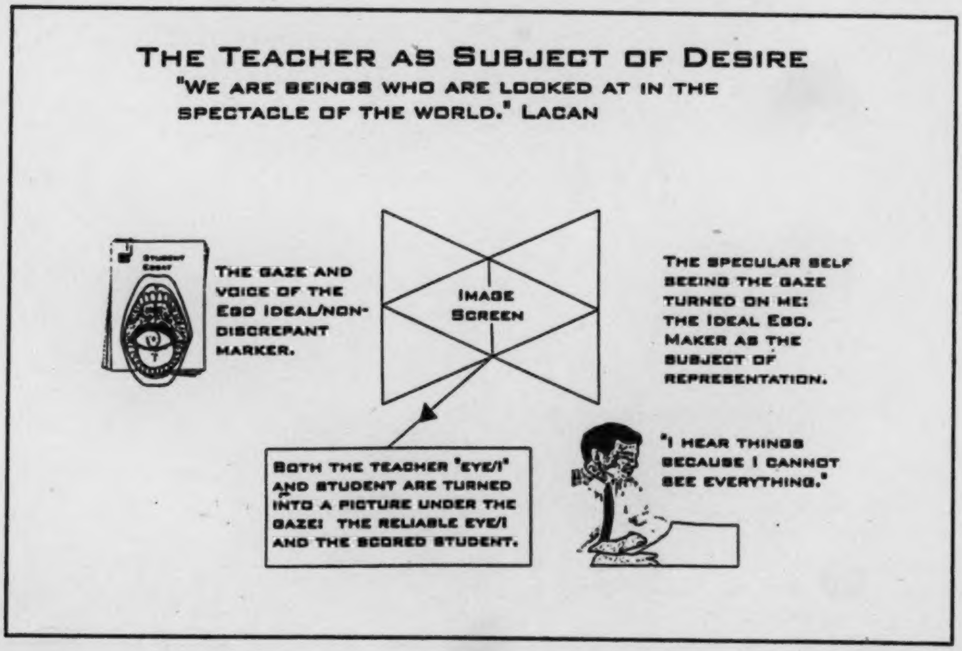
After comparing marks that I assigned to my students' writing to those of the Alberta Education markers, I explored similarities and differences in the grades assigned to the papers. In particular I looked for examples of student work that received scores that were at variance with my own scores. As the chart indicates, several papers that fit this description.

What struck me after reviewing my scoring of the papers was how congruent my marks were with those of the Alberta Education markers. In this way I grew more interested in the Lacanian reading of how my reading of the curriculum (as written by the student) causes me to speak both as "subject of the texts" I am reading and as a subject that is being seen. In particular, how I function as a marker within the autopoietic system of the Diploma Exam Program became quite apparent. Drawing from Lacan (1979), I will later examine how student writing causes me as a teacher to speak "in the field of the Other" (p. 207).

What I found in marking the student papers was how formulaic their writing was. It was difficult to recognize their individual styles of writing and unique interpretations of the course. The predictability of their responses and the generalized nature of their writing immediately raised questions for me. I am now convinced the standardized way that students wrote their essays rendered marker reliability much less problematic.

When I began the research I thought a major focus would be to explore the psychological "inner distance" created in my own assessment of student writing and that of the Alberta Education markers. In short, I wanted to explore my identifications with shifting significations and displacements created by differences between my own reading of student writing and that of external Alberta Education markers. I had expected, as one might see in the illustration in Figure 3, that I saw myself as a broker in the field of significations that attempt to recast the disarray of student writing into what Žižek calls the "the proof and testimony of a triumph" by the external examination symbolic coding over the imaginary of teacher-markers (as cited in Feldstein, 1996, p. 52).

Figure 3


THE TEACHER AS SUBJECT OF DESIRE
"WE ARE BEINGS WHO ARE LOOKED AT IN THE SPECTACLE OF THE WORLD." LACAN
THE GAZE AND VOICE OF THE EGO IDEAL/NON-DISCREPANT MARKER.
IMAGE SCREEN
THE SPECULAR SELF SEEING THE GAZE TURNED ON ME: THE IDEAL EGO. MAKER AS THE SUBJECT OF REPRESENTATION.
BOTH THE TEACHER "EYE/I" AND STUDENT ARE TURNED INTO A PICTURE UNDER THE GAZE! THE RELIABLE EYE/I AND THE SCORED STUDENT.
"I HEAR THINGS BECAUSE I CANNOT SEE EVERYTHING."

The above diagram illustrates the scopic preparation of *the look* by teacher markers achieved in "Marker Training Sessions" at the start of each marking session (the surveillance of student work) as it dialectically (p)layed against myself and the gaze of the Other-as-audience. As the Figures 1-3 indicate, I had assumed that reading my own students' writing would allow me to problematize the "gaze as it becomes a *trompe d'oeil* or surface appearance whose only reassurance lies in the double strophe of seeing itself see itself" (p. 53).

I found instead that student essays were generally voided of particularities that would identify them as individual students in my classes. The examples they used to support their positions were largely like so many other papers I've read over the course of marking Diploma Examinations. The few papers that contained peculiarities were not so distinctive so as to be identifiable from my class. The marks below indicate the relative congruency of my assessments with those of Alberta Education markers.

Diploma Examination Marking Comparison
(June 1996)

Left hand marks indicate my scores. Right hand marks are Alberta Education scores.
N= 24

Student Paper	Exploration of the Issue	Defence of Position	Quality of Examples	Quality of Expression	Score (30)	+/-	M.C.	Final Mark
A	4/4	3/3	3/3	3/3	19/19	0	56	75/75
B	4/3.5	3/3	4/3.5	4/3	22/20	+2	51	73/71
C	3/3.5	3/3	3/3	3/3	18/19	-1	43	61/62
D	4/3.5	4/3.5	3/3	4/3	23/20	+3	54	77/74
E	4/3.5	3/3	4/3.5	3/3.5	21/20	+1	58	87/86
F	4/3.5	3.5/3.5	4/3.5	4/3.5	23/22	+1	51	72/71
G	4/3.5	4/4	4/3.5	4/3	24/22	+2	57	81/79
H	3/3	2.5/2.5	2.5/2.5	3/3	16/16	0	44	60/60
I	4/3.5	4/3.5	3.5/3	4/4	23/21	+2	42	65/63
J	2/1.5	2/1.5	1/1	2/2	10/10	0	49	59/59
K	2/1.5	2/1	2/1.5	2/2	12/9	+3	28	40/37
L	4/3	4/3.5	4/3.5	4/4	24/21	+3	40	64/61
M	4/3	4/4	4/4	4/3	24/22	+2	63	87/85
N	3/2.5	2.5/3	3/3	3/2.5	17/18	-1	53	70/71
O	5/5	5/5	5/4.5	5/4.5	30/29	+1	51	81/80
P	3/2	3/2.5	2.5/2	3/3	17/14	+3	26	43/40
Q	4/3.5	4/4	3/3	4/4	22/22	0	46	68/68
R	3/3	3/3	3/3	3/2.5	18/18	0	56	74/74
S	4/4	4/3.5	4/4	4/3.5	24/23	+1	61	85/84
T	3.5/3.5	3.5/3.5	3/3	3/3	20/20	0	39	59/59
U	3/2.5	3/2.5	3/2	3/2.5	18/14	+4	52	70/66

V	2.5/2.5	2.5/2.5	2/2	3/3	15/15	0	44	59/59
W	3/2.5	3/2.5	2.5/2	2.5/3	17/15	+1	44	62/61
X	4/4	5/5	4.5/5	5/5	28/28	0	36	64/64
				Total:	**19.1/20.2**		**68.1/67.0**	

After re-scoring the 24 essay responses a recalculation of the students' final marks was undertaken. As the tabulations indicate, the overall class average went up by 1.1%. Eight students had no change in their final mark, five students had their mark increase by 1%, four students had their marks increase by 2%, four students saw a 3% increase, while one student's mark increased by 4%. Two students had their mark drop by 1%. While the average mark for the group of papers given by the Alberta Education markers was 19.1/30 (63.7%) the re-scored averages I assigned was 20.2/30 (67.3%). The overall difference in averages assigned to the essays by myself as compared by the Alberta Education markers was +3.6%.

As I will indicate in what follows, it is my belief that what I had failed to consider in my Lacanian reading of student writing in the Diploma Examination was the larger contextual issue of the need of students and myself, as a teacher, to maintain the autopoietic system that the testing program represents. In mapping out my initial expectation of 'being able to see my students' work, I had failed to recognize the power of the invocatory drive within the gaze/look (see Figure 3) to allow my students to write as both subjects and agents.

I had failed to consider the students as activated readers of the Diploma Examination program and how they tactically maneuver through the gaze in the examination process. Immediately I decided to contact five students and interview them about their responses to the Diploma Examination essay question and how they saw their participation in the course and examination. In this way I tried to recognize student writing as objects that looked at me as well. The discussions with the students proved very fruitful in that I was able to locate both myself as teacher and them as students within an autopoietic relation as producers and activated readers of discourse. Just how students and I read the essay response grades became an exploration in how subjects configure their environment through discursive tactics and strategies. How these tactics and strategies organize the provincial evaluation program as an autopoietic system is what follows.

Before offering the specific implications of these findings and the specifics of my comments on student work, a contextualization of the move towards accountability and external evaluation measures is needed. Certainly, as Usher and Edwards (1994) have noted, the impulse to assess competencies and educational outcomes has led to a proliferation of power-knowledge discursive maneuvers in educational bureaucracies that attempt to suture *education* with *demonstration* (pp. 110-111). Competence, ideally demonstrated within the discourse of the Master, is achieved through both external testing and student self-administered "humane" practices such as peer evaluation, self-evaluation, and performance appraisals that are now troped as "authentic evaluations" in public schools. As an Alberta Education (1996) guide to assessment underscored, "The goal of learning is competence demonstrated in a specific set of ways – nothing more, nothing less" (p. 114). The Master becomes internalized, and vanishes. That is when his power is greatest (Lacan, 1993).

Breaking the "monocultural gaze" is what Lyotard (1983b) gestured at in his critique of *performativity*. For Lyotard, the logic of capitalism, with its emphasis on efficiency, is primarily a prescriptive in Wittgensteinein language game that eliminates the possibility for considering other criteria for truth claims. In a Lacanian sense, what is *beautiful* or *true* is construed around what is *useful* and *effective* in the discourse of the Master. In this analysis, I read the slide of the vanishing mediator as a variation of the discourse of the University, as so-called objective measures of what is "excellent" vs. "adequate" writing get circulated in the specular economy described in Figure 3.

Central to understanding autopoietic systems and the workings of the Diploma Examination Program is the role of discourse and its production and circulation as a necessary part of the continual dissolution and reintegration of social systems. While there are a multitude of readings of 'discourse' in the literature (Craib, 1992, pp. 183-184), I will draw on John Fiske's (1993) sense that discourse "produces a knowledge of the real which it presents and re-presents to us in constant circulation and usage" (p. 15).

For Fiske, the act of articulating one's sense of the world is "putting into discourse" social relations and understandings.

Discourse is never neutral. It exists in structural relations to power and economic production. As indicated in the previous chapter, in his reading of discourse, Fiske underscores the importance of understanding discourse in terms of *its ability to speak to us and our ability to speak to it*. In short, the meanings of texts emerge through contestation to the social relationships we find ourselves mired in. "We use discourse" as Fiske (1987) would claim, "to form our sense of the social world and to form our relations by which we engage in it" (p. 6).

Discourse exists rooted within social relations. An autopoietic sense the discourse of the Master (Alberta Education's claim to possess the standards for educational excellence) constitutes the means by which individual teachers construct the differences that produce the sense of the "observer who sees difference" or, as Luhmann (1990) argues, the fascination with the system (of language) is how it produces and conceals from the place of the Other (p. 105).

As signifying practices, discourses act to regenerate themselves through the circulation of continuous and seamless relations of meaning. If we are normalized according to the number of tests we pass, then social systems are strengthened by the number of tests they can generate. As more and more subjects pass these tests, the social system strengthens. There may be an intuitive reading of this in Nietzsche's enigmatic claim, "What does not kill me will make me stronger." He could have easily applied this to social systems as well.

For Fiske (1987), culture is "a river of discourses" where

> at times the flow is comparatively calm; at others, the undercurrents, which always disturb the depths under even the calmest surface, erupt into turbulence. Rocks and promontories can turn its currents into eddies and counter currents, can change its direction or even reverse its (p. 15).

If we think of work as sites of cultural practices, it is not difficult to integrate Fiske's "river of discourses" into a reading of the controversies and paradoxes swirling around teachers' efforts to work within the discourses of accountability and the "discursive currents and countercurrents" (p. 7) that constitute life in classrooms about what is evaluation for. How teachers work to negotiate this river is a currently under-researched area. Depending on how one reads the social agency of teachers, we can imagine the 'river' metaphor as alternately locating teachers as bathers in calm, easily negotiated waters, as skillful swimmers negotiating the challenges of a technical river, or as being submerged, drowning in the unstoppable forces of hegemonic panoptic representations of their work in terms of external measures of student performance.

Bateson draws on the river metaphor to describe the relationship between the individual and social structures:

> I pictured the relation between ethos and cultural structure as being like the relation between a river and its bank: 'the river molds the banks and the banks guide the river' (as cited in Fleener, 1997, p. 12).

As Fleener suggests from Bateson's metaphor, in terms of causality, it is difficult to distinguish between cause and effect, the mover and the moved. How does one locate the agency in a river – in the thing *contained* or the *container*? River floods remind us that, like human cognitive difference, *the thing* cannot be contained. Or has Lacan might ask, where does the subject (the teacher) fall into this river of samenesses construed by the Master?

As Fiske (1996) reminds us, in the postmodern world there can no longer be construed something framed as a singular "media event" (p. 2). Certainly the publication of student scores on Diploma Examinations has become a semi-annual event in newspapers across Alberta. A recent example was the publication in the spring of 1999, rank Alberta high schools in the major papers and rating schools based on their Diploma Exam performance. Despite efforts by both the Student Evaluation branch and school boards to prevent the release of examination results without contextualized background information (jurisdiction size, socio-economic profiles and so on), newspapers proceeded with publication of school by school results in 1995. A media circus ensued – where schools were ranked by their test scores, contrary to all that their editorial boards were told about the lack of validity of such rankings. The ranking of schools emerged for many Albertans as point of entry into the discourse of *performativity*. Now these rankings have been supplanted and diffused by the sheer volume of publications passed on to the public by schools eager to convince the public that they are achieving results for their students. So how is what is going on in schools being represented by the discourse of *performativity*? What are the real indicators of student achievement?

Fiske (1996) has little patience for the debate about what constitutes the 'real' event since it is the representation and mediation of that event within the "language in social use" that constructs the structure of our understanding of an event. This structure of "language in use" is what "discourse" is.

> Discourse can never be abstracted from the conditions of its production and circulation in the way that language can. The most significant relations of any piece of discourse are to the social conditions of its use, not the signifying system in general, and its analysis exemplifies not an instance of that system in practice, but its function in deploying power within those conditions (p. 3).

Yet discourse must not be allowed to become the form of life that strives to contain the forms of living. Consider this student's comments as he describes his sense of urgency in putting together a response.

> I knew I had one hour to answer the question so I grabbed the stuff I had running around in my head and just tried to put it together. As I started writing certain things that came into my mind didn't make sense so I didn't put them down. After two pages the direction I was going just became clear. The problem was as I got more clearer where I was going the number of examples I could think of began to run out. Then I started thinking that I should change my mind. You know, to let other ideas in.

His comment gestures towards the pieces of the Real that are lost through the intrusion of master signifiers such as test performance in our ways of living. "Letting other ideas in" raises the question about what is the structure of a text. Bakhtin (1984) questions the notion of looking upon a text as a completely self-contained unity whose meaning and significance can be construed without attention to the context or the situatedness of the writer in terms of the enunciations and utterances that constitute the "dynamic milieu" of the author. So, for the reader of student writing, the essay response may appear as a monological text, but in actuality carries within it the polyphony or 'river of discourses' configured by Fiske. The dynamic context of student writing is what

Bakhtin's privileging of *parole* in what I became most interested as I began to sense the struggles they described in 'fitting in' their thoughts into the containment field of the Diploma Essay response.

The structures of that student writing carries within the essay responses may be understood within Bakhtin's (1984) chronotopes. The chronotope is an "interconnectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" that act as an external and immobile place on the extra temporal vertical axis" (p. 84). How time and place are configured by writers is what Bakhtin finds helpful in the chronotope. For example, "the adventure time" chronotope of Romantic Greek in the second to sixth centuries carried within them a fluid sense of space as the adventurers moved through places over a series of events. In what follows I will examine how the reading of student writing in the Diploma Exam Essays validates Bakhtin's (1984) understanding of the heteroglossia of texts, and how teacher marking assumes a posture of mediating the often paradoxical and contradictory nature of student texts.

Bakhtin's reading of texts as carriers of discourses provides a way to understand how the centripetal and centrifugal forces of language are attended to by Student Evaluation markers. Much of what students report in their deliberations about what to include or to exclude in their writing reflects the self-surveillance and agency they have taken up as tacticians. As I will indicate from my interviews with students, students are not passive writers scribbling in their frantic answers to the panoptic Other. Rather, they exercise judgement in their understanding of the effects of their utterances on the imagined Other, the teacher-marker who one student candidly described as someone "who seriously needs a life if they can sit all day reading the same essays over and over again."

What follows then is a summary of my cross-reading of Bakhtin and Lacan in a fashion that will permit a synthetic reading of the ways students and teachers occupy the centrifugal and centripetal effects of language effects in the Social Studies 30 Diploma Examination. Following the chart I will illustrate examples of these four types of discourses at work.

THE DISCURSIVE CURRENTS OF BAKHTIN AND LACAN

TYPE OF DISCOURSE (BAKHTIN)	Authoritative	Internally persuasive	Idiolect	Discourse of madness (autolect)
SOCIAL EFFECTS	centripetal	consensus	dissensus	centrifugal
VISUAL ECONOMY	Invisible (the gaze)	Transparency (the look)	Uncanny	Grotesque
SOURCE	the Big Other (the Father of Enjoyment)	interpellated subjects	feminine undecidiability	Absolute *otherness* (does not lack)
LACANIAN REGISTER	Veiled Phallus	Symbolic	Imaginary	Real
EXEMPLARS FROM SOCIAL STUDIES 30 STUDENT ESSAYS	Use of conventional binaries nationalism/ internationalism, fanaticism/moderation. Reference to Hitler's extremism, deployment of the fascist Other. Little emotional investment in the examples given.	Personal investments in the examples used with reference to self-assessment of the desirability of actions taken by historical figures.	Personal examples or meanings constructed of course concepts (e.g. personal conflicts with others, emotional investments in the issue)	Fragmented and disjointed meanings attributed to course concepts. Contradictory and paradoxical readings of crucial terms.

The four discourses are evident in the student writing; and, as a reader of the student writing along a continuum from centrifugal to centripetal forces, it became apparent that I was pointing to and being pointed at by both the student writer and the history of my training as a marker. I was reading to maintain what Mingers (1997) would call the "homeostasis" of the autopoietic relationship between student and teacher exchanging the standards that configure or give form to the system. Importantly, though, the Symbolic 'system' co-emergent between us has nothing intrinsically constant or valuable in it; "structures that underly an autopoietic system are accidental but the organization which it maintains homeostatically is essential to its being what it is" (Mingers, 1997, p. 87).

Authoritative Discourse

As I have already indicated, most students drew heavily on this discourse. By providing conventional examples from the textbook sources in the course, students constructed their responses from a wide variety of case studies from twentieth century history. A standard example of "negative nationalism" portrayed the Nazis as Other, "the evil nationalism of Nazi Germany," as Student N positioned Germany. By describing how the German population was manipulated by Goebbles and the government "propaganda," this paper was one of the briefest and sparsest papers I read from the sample. That the paper received a mark of 18/30 was significant to me in that it was one of the two I rated lower than the Alberta Education markers.

Time and again in reading through the 24 papers I was struck by the coherence of the historical examples used with few students wavering beyond the 'safe' examples of Nazism as a manifestation of extreme nationalism and Canadian "moderation" as model for what one student coined as "balanced nationalism." An exemplar of this approach was Student E:

> Hitler and the Nazi Party are a prime example of how national advancement can go so far as to endanger the security of the rest of the world. When Adolph Hitler decided he would like to have one pure race, an Aryan race, he developed reforms to convince his people to persecute the Jews. He manipulated people by telling them what they wanted to hear. He could make their country strong once again if he had their total support.

Although I devoted only one week to the examination of World War II and offered equal class time to more current examples of international conflict, as in the case of the Gulf War, I was surprised how few students used the Gulf War in their essays. While 12 papers referred to the Gulf War conflict, only 5 developed the example to any extent. When I asked the five students about this afterwards, they indicated that because they expected "lots of multiple choice questions on Hitler," they studied that segment of the course the most extensively. As one student commented, "look, I had three exams to get ready for - each worth half my grade, I studied the really important stuff and left the rest. From what I saw of old exams there were hardly any questions about recent wars, so why bother?"

What strikes me about the student's comment is the way we as teachers need to be mindful of our students' role as an "activated audience" in relation to the text of the Diploma Examination. The examination is a cultural artifact within a river of discourses (Fiske, 1996). As a polysemic text, we need to be aware of students as active participants in the construction and determination of significance of examinations as cultural works just as I tried to illustrate in the previous chapter. For students writing the Diploma Examination, there resourcefulness in appropriating and deploying the authoritative discourse is an indication of their embodied engagement as cultural agents making their way through the test.

Johnson (1987) explains how in "having a world," we deploy metaphoric understandings of our environment through the isomorphic structures and capacities of our bodies. For Johnson, *inside/outside* and *up/down* are embodied patterns of our physicality that are codified in our "structures of sensibility" (p. 14). The students I interviewed consistently talked about what was "inside/outside" the curriculum, how they had to "get on top of all the stuff in the course." How students demonstrate these common sense engagements with the Diploma Examination needs to be researched further. For now, I argue that the students maintained their level of self-organization as cultural agents through the structures of "the body in mind" that Johnson reads as shared patterns or structures that are embodied and enacted in textual reading of the examination.

Internally Persuasive

Examples of student writing within this rubric are varied and common. Students struggle in their writing (at my encouragement) to negotiate with the reader on the meanings given to terms from the course. For example, Student D described the importance of nationalism in his life:

> If our country decides to go to war to promote nationalism, I could be killed or made to fight in their war….I could be killed or conscripted. Also my family could get injured or made to fight. War, used to promote nationalism, would have a large effect on international stability.

Student G opened her paper:

> As a Canadian who has traveled to other parts of the world and observed their life-styles and national ideologies, I have a great respect for my home country. You could even go as far to say I'm

> patriotic. Sure Canada has its flaws, but all-in-all, its a damn good country.

By invoking the example drawn from her travels to a variety of countries, including an extensive stay in northern Ireland, Student G built her essay around the binary of *here* and *there*. By troping Canada as peaceful and stable, and other countries as unsettled, G sets up an equivalency between "nationalism if moderate" and the possibility of countries like Canada being leaders in peace-keeping, contrasting countries where "stubborn nationalism" can be "taken to extremes" like Northern Ireland.

Another example of internally persuasive discourse where student writings that appropriated quotes from course videos, within an argument that they were constructing, without contextualizing or foregrounding the passage. Consider Student V's statement:

> Would the strong promotion of nationalism achieve international stability? I don't think so, and I don't think Russia or any other large nation would feel the same international stability that the U.S. would. *Is it really true that if we want peace we must prepare for war?* I hope not, and if it is I wish it were not.

The italicized segment is a direct quote from Lord Phillip Lowell Baker, a renowned British peace activist who was featured in a video from our class.

Idiolect

Verging on this discourse was the ploy by Student S who saw hope for the world in a growing awareness by nations that they must work together:

> Luckily nationalism is not entirely bad. Organizations such as the United Nations promote "world nationalism" or pride in one's planet. The recent movement towards this policy can be seen in the number of peace-keeping missions which the UN has been involved in...this internationalism differs from nationalism in that people have one common thing to be proud of, rather than thinking their country is better than another.

There were numerous cases of students constructing definitions of course concepts by drawing from personal experiences and events. By and large these students did so in the beginning of the papers as they attempted to map what the markers call 'the importance of the issue'. Although students are encouraged by Alberta Education documents to develop personal connection to the issue throughout the paper, very few students chose to do so. This applies to the 24 papers I reviewed in this study and in my experiences as a marker. It is not surprising that student do not employ this approach since they tend to believe the "big question," as one student called the essay question is a matter of some disagreement while the truth about the historical examples is well established and leaves no room for interpretation. This interpretation of historical events is of course an unfortunate one and is something with which I struggle with students.

When students do provide definitions of terms in idiosyncratic ways the results for them are obviously disastrous in terms of the marks they are awarded. Student K wrote a 10 page paper that was a weaving argument that appeared quite confused and disconnected to both me and the markers. Consider this passage:

> In Canada today our country has strong national patronage and prestige levels which means we are a lot for our own country. As Canadians we don't believe in war as much as the United States, however we take our peace keeping and peace maintaining quite seriously. The United Nations is our source of peace maintaining and enforcement, and we spend millions of dollars a year to be able to help other countries during bad times.

This student struggled like this throughout the essay. There were numerous specific terms such as "peace maintaining and enforcement" that referred to a presentation she had done on the UN and the options it could pursue in settling disputes. An article the student had extensively reviewed and that she had in mind as she was writing categorized the UN's options from least intrusive (peace-keeping) to most intrusive (peace enforcement). Unfortunately, the student was unable to elaborate the definitions of the terms she was deploying, and certainly her unfortunate slip-up using "national patronage" rather than "national patriotism" caused markers some difficulty.

The paper I reviewed contained a rich variety of examples of students refiguring and recontextualizing key terms from the course. Unfortunately, as the longer papers I reviewed indicated, as the frequency of idiolect increased so too did the centrifugal effects for the markers reading the papers. Over my years marking I have discovered that teacher-markers are most frustrated by papers that are lengthy, replete with idiosyncratic definitions and allusions to social studies terms.

Discourse of Madness

As far as I could discern, the examples of this discourse evident in student writing were few. What stood out for me were occasional passages where students referred to quotes from videos we had viewed in class that were knitted into explanations of events in what may have seemed a disjointed and incomprehensible text. This was a difficulty for Student J, who scored 49/70 on her multiple choice questions but only 10/30 on her written component. Student J felt frustrated by her inability to express the ideas that were "scattered around in my head." Unable to make up her mind which examples to use from the course, Student J felt she could "summarize them in really general terms." The result is indicated below:

> If a nation seeks nationalism with concepts and beliefs of high military arment [*sic*] and national security, collective security for it's relations cannot be met. However, if a nation obtains nationalism with values such as the welfare of human kind in mind, collective security with other countries can be met. Obviously, if collective security is met national security would not exist. Therefore the need for the nuclear arms race would be omitted and continued peace would occur.

What is beguiling about this essay is the borderline it inhabits in between idiolect and madness. At points the paper seems to be constructing a self-contained and enigmatic text, but still appears as a unity. At key points the paper draws in the reader with a phrase or sentence that lures the reader into an argument or meaningful flow of text. Then the text collapses on itself, falling into incomprehensibility and neologisms.

It may be that the discourse of madness was not readily evident in any of the papers I reviewed. Given the academic and disciplined nature of the course, students are disciplined into the rigors of constructing a logical and comprehensible argument. One paper offered the closest reading of the madness discourse in its intense use of examples that were truncated and lacked transition from one to the next. This paper, from Student K, traces through six case studies but only develops them in single sentences or paragraphs. What is difficult in the paper is that 'it makes more sense than it can contain'. Referring to "procedures" that countries need to follow if they are going to participate in a "just war," the writer fails to explain that she is elaborating on the "Just

War Theory" proposed by Trudy Govier of the University of Calgary. As Student K's paper reads, there is a ludic quality in her transition from one idea to the next.

> If we could avoid war in any possible way it would be to avoid war – only make it become a war only unless all procedures have between executed. These procedures would prevent a war, and promote less centralization on a government what it believes it achieves is right or wrong within a city. These techniques are ....Just Cause – you have to have a good reason to do what you are doing.

Student K, in her discussion with me about her paper, felt "all I could do was talk in real general ways since there was so much stuff in the course you know." Complaining about her low mark on her multiple choice questions (28/70), K felt that she had learned a lot in the course but "I couldn't get it across - you know?"

Being overwhelmed and trying to reach out to a place beyond one's self is an experience several students spoke about. "The trick is not to crowd too many things together because of the rush to try to answer the question," offered one student. From the few examples I read it appeared that "madness" manifests itself as a struggle by students overwhelmed by the sheer variety of possible responses. "It is not that I had nothing to say; I couldn't figure out where to start or finish – it was just going in circles." As well, consider Student V's statement:

> Would the strong promotion of nationalism achieve international stability? I don't think so, and I don't think Russia or any other large nation would feel the same international stability that the U.S. would. Is it really true that if we want peace we must prepare for war? I hope not, and if it is I wish it were not.

For Lacan, the *copula* created between the signifier and signified is the Phallus that produces a plurality of possibilities. The Phallus is the *is* or being attributed to a thing (Oliver, 1995, p. 75). If that is the case, then Fiske (1987) is right is asserting that the operation of the gaze is not something that exists in a vacuum, that in all discursive activity a river of meanings runs through it. The five students I interviewed all described the process of what one student characterized as "fighting with myself over which voices to listen to."

> The author is not to be found in the language of the narrator, not in the normal literary language to which the story opposes itself... but

> rather, the author utilizes now one language, now another, in order to avoid giving himself up wholly to either of them; he makes use of this verbal give-and-take, this dialogue of languages at every point in his work, in order that he himself might remain as it were neutral with regard to language, a third party in a quarrel between two people (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 314).

Consider Student M who was extremely frustrated that she could not think of any "good examples" of nationalism being a positive force in international relations. "I knew I was in trouble because my essay was so one-sided. Even though I wrote eight pages of good stuff opposing nationalism I remember what you told us: "Show both sides of the argument." Student M was a strong student who worked hard all semester long. She received score of 63/70 on the multiple choice questions but only 22/30 on her written response section. We discussed the difficulty she had in preparing the essay. One passage stood out for her.

> Nationalism is never a positive force for achieving international stability. Nationalism is a positive force towards war. A way that politicians used to manipulate people into wanting what they wanted. Nationalism should become a force that is known only in history books. A reminder of our past and the methods through which war came about.

"I knew after I finished my paper that I was in trouble," Student K confessed. "I didn't do the "Christmas Tree" thing you told us about" (referring to a strategy where students sketch a tree and list argument for and against a position). "The point is, I think nationalism is a bad thing, and I gave lots of good reasons why."

After marking Student M's paper I was struck by how persuasive it was. After scoring it 4 across all the dimensions, I was surprised that the "Exploration of the Issue" and "Quality of Expression" received only 3s. Reviewing the paper suggests to me that the opening pages may have been problematic for some readers:

> When I turned five my parents enrolled me in Kindergarten. There I learned that everyone must work together. Children who wouldn't share their toys or beat up on small children were punished. We were told to work together. Our teacher said that we were all friends and must play fairly with one another. Nationalism promotes keeping all "the toys yourself" or rather prosperity. A nationalistic child would tell every other person he was better than them. He or

> she would beat all those who had what he or she wanted or who he or she found offensive. A person who paid attention to their kindergarten lessons would know we all have to share and work together because no one is better than anyone else.
>
> International stability may not necessarily mean that every nation gets along with every nation. It does however, mean that everything is fairly organized and each country understands each other. How can there be international stability when one nation is saying "I want this!" or "I'm bigger than you!" or "Give me that!" like a kindergarten child. After all if you come from a nationalistic place you believe that your nation is singularly better than everyone else. Nationalism promotes inequality and a sense of competition over who's better than whom.

I recall Student M's presentation on the superpowers arms race and the powerful analogy she had appropriated from Helen Caldicot's film *If You Love This Planet* about two boys playing in a sandbox fighting over toys. There was a class discussion that day about the book *All I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten* (Robert Fulghum). The class discussed the arms race in terms of competition and the futility of fighting over something if what is being fought over gets destroyed in the process. M also recalls the poster a student brought in later that week from the *All I Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten* book, listing the lessons such as "share your things, clean-up your mess." As M recalled "that poster just stuck in my mind when I started writing the essay and I got angrier and angrier as I thought of the examples of pointless wars we covered in class."

Student M's paper was, in my assessment, a clear and thoughtful analysis of the consequences of nationalism. Linking nationalism to fanaticism she raised the examples of Hitler, the superpower anxiety over competing ideologies, and the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. I am concerned that M's deployment of the *Kindergarten* analogy was construed by markers as a vague understanding of the tension between nationalism and internationalism. That M choose not to write about any conflicting values or attitudes (internationalism, cooperation) most likely cost her marks. As for the low mark on Quality of Expression, I cannot venture a reason why a mark of 3 was awarded, although I suspect the lengthy discussion about kindergarten and the repetition of the analogy throughout the examples of conflict in the twentieth century may have been distracting for markers.

The chronotope of the kindergarten classroom was, in M's mind, to "remember what is really important – getting along no matter what." M's affective investment in both her presentation on the arms race and the *Kindergarten* analogy was simultaneously a point of enablement and limitation for her. As a position paper, M's paper is laced with problematic analogies and personal anecdotes about her childhood that generate a centrifugal force in the paper. I suspect that the numerous case studies, thorough as they were, transmitted an incomprehensibility to the paper, especially given M's claim that "nationalism is never a positive force." M lost the internally persuasiveness of her examples to the disconcerting claim of "never." "I know you told us to never say never, but that's how I felt and that's how I still feel. It was a good essay," M claimed as we closed off our discussion.

The difficulty M ran into with her paper was resonated with the Student L's paper. L was another very strong student. Her multiple choice score on the exam was 40/70 and her essay mark, 21/30. While L was satisfied with her essay mark, she felt the paper was "one of the best things I've written given the time I had." My score for her written response was 24/30. What was interesting about L's paper was the equivalency she set-up between "extreme nationalism and dictatorship." Arguing that nationalism is a force that can make people feel good about themselves ("for example in America we stand for democracy, freedom of the people, human rights, apple pie, Uncle Sam and fried chicken"), student L went on to argue quite provocatively that "love and loyalty to one's group" is a force that had led "everyone to fear for their security." What was striking in L's Department assigned marks was that she received a 3 for Exploration of the Issue and 3.5 for Quality of Examples. Consider the passage below as typical of M's case studies.

> It has been confirmed by our world's statistics that poverty is the concern of the world's stability or at least it should be. 80% of the world wealth is used by 60% of it's population. This means that 40% do without clean water shelter, food, etc. Yet we, being included in this 60% are more worried about threatening force - countries with strong ideals of nationalism - taking over us so that

> are beliefs will be crushed. So in order to stop this we spend one trillion dollars a year on armaments - arming ourselves with nuclear weapons, etc. But if we could take this one trillion dollars that is spent every year by all the nations in the world arming themselves against one another, and use it to get rid of the poverty, only ¼ would have to be used. A quarter of this trillion would provide all the world with clean water, food, and disease prevention. It would stop soil erosion, raw materials depletion, agricultural hardship, rainforest depletion. Etc. so then what's wrong with us? Why don't we do this? How come we can't work towards a universal culture that has equality of wealth, unity, etc.?

While L was not sure she remembered all the statistics "exactly," she recalled writing the paper with an activity we completed in class with the World Vision 30 Hour Famine organization in mind. A guest speaker who had done aid work in Zaire had visited the class and discussed the preponderance of global spending on armaments as opposed to social spending. Citing statistics from the United Nations, the speaker handed out a sheet of paper with one thousand boxes on it. Asking the students to imagine each box was one billion dollars the speaker had the students shade in the number of boxes that would be needed to cover the financial costs of dealing with the world's major social and economic problems on an annual basis. While many students covered in large portions of the page they were surprised to learn that only $250 billion (250 boxes) would be required (World Population Research Institute).

I recall that presentation well, as do most students. The speaker's stories about Zaire and the graphic presentation left a real impact on students. Student L recalls, "that guy really upset us in a big way. My Church supported famine relief but I never understood that a big part of the problem was our priorities." When L discussed her essay with me she indicated that she felt very strongly that "love and loyalty" was the theme of her essay and how "screwed up we are because we love the wrong things." She goes on to say, "When I started writing I thought I would use the lyrics to that John Lennon song, *Imagine*, but then I thought, no they would think I was just a romantic kid."

The construal of a seventeen year old teenager to imagine an Other out there who will frame her as "romantic and naïve" is a sad commentary on where the Diploma Examination locates students. Irigaray (1985) wonders what possibilities there would be in a world where the abject could speak, where the hierarchical categories of language were peeled away "with no possibility of returning to one single origin" (p. 135 – 142). Fearing that her quoting Lennon's *Imagine* would locate her in the discourse of an idiolect of a sullen teenager ("romantic and naïve") motivated student L to eliminate this reference in her paper. Given the lower mark she received, I suspect her action was prudent.

The John Lennon song *Imagine* has figured largely in my classes when the subject of war and values are discussed. I have used the song (and printed lyrics) as a basis for students to critique the failures of various arms control treaties, or to respond to a class reading assignment about the origins of nationalism. One project I have students do is present a music video or song lyric that explores an issue surrounding conflict. In reviewing the 24 essays 4 of them contained references to song (two from *Imagine*). What struck me about the references is that the students quoted the lyrics verbatim – the only quotes I read in the 24 papers. I raise this only as an indication that the authoritative and internally persuasive discourses would call on students to cite 'expert knowledge'. As one student remarked when we were discussing writing strategies for the examination, "Quoting poetry in English is okay, but we don't do that here."

So this is how it is then. "We don't do that here" is the dictum from a young man who knows where languages belong. Occupying the house of reason, social studies is construed by my students, I sadly admit, as "about the stuff that people already know for sure." I am not sure which to mourn – my own inability to demonstrate this is not the case, or the fact that the student has so cogently internalized the invocation of the epistemological hierarchies of his time and place.

The Autopoiesis of a World Over-flowing with Examining Subjects

The foundation of the Diploma Examination Program can be interpreted as the need for autopoietic systems to construct the identity of teacher-markers around "the continual dissolution of the system" (Luhmann, 1990, p. 9). The formation of modernist identity is construed around what all consciousness must do to distinguish itself from the other – the production of the synthesis of difference. The existence of what Luhmann called a "co-presence" is evident to me throughout the marking of student essays. As Lacan reminds Luhmann, the signifier is represents the subject for another signifier (Elmer, 1995, p. 124). The purposes of the "person" in a strict reading of autopoiesis is to keep the communication going, to maintain the psychic and social systems going or, as Lacan would read it, to maintain the integrity of the Symbolic order in the face of the assaults on it by the Real.

Yet who advocates for the unconscious in the relations between teachers, students, and Student Evaluation Branch? If the unconscious is the mind in relations, then where are we left as agents within the gaze of the discourses of *performativity*? For teachers, the greatest challenge faced by the introduction of the Diploma Examinations is not in determining what the examinations can do, but in forgetting what they cannot do. As Lacan (1993) has argued in his analysis of "discourses of the Master," the psychic impulse to be "in the know" is a powerful motivating factor in human activity. The avidity of the gaze in looking upon the rankings of schools is an example of this impulse. The discourse of the Master seeks to enjoy its own reason: "I AM = I AM KNOWLEDGE = I AM THE ONE WHO KNOWS" (p. 134). For Lacan, a central problem in understanding human agency was the subject's relation to discourse and the subject's struggle to achieve jouissance or pleasure. To control the world, to contain it within the signifiers that are produced within the self-referential loop of repetitions, is the bureaucrat's dream (p. 134).

It is also the dream of Alberta Education, and many school divisions like my own, to develop assessment tools that will make transparent the "exit outcomes" or "competencies" of students. As a group of teachers, we were told by Alberta Education representatives in 1986 at a standard setting meeting for the grade 12 Social Studies 30 examination, "be assured that we want your input into what the standards ought to be. We know the system works, we simply want to communicate this to the public." When a teacher asked, "Why go through all this trouble then?", a shrug was the only response.

Jameson argues that within the postmodern condition, individuals no longer produce works but ceaselessly reshuffle fragments of prexistent artifacts (as cited in Simpson, 1995, p. 162). Foster (1996) reads in Jameson a sense of the postmodern investment in the "schizophrenic breakdown in language and temporality that provokes a compensatory investment in the image and the instant" (p. 165).

Has the Diploma Examination Program created an endlessly, unceasing reshuffling of student essay responses whose answers have already been written in for them?

> Writing the essay for the exam was like rushed but I had lots of time. I know this seems weird but it seemed that I was writing for so many different people. So I picked the things to say that made easy sense. Anything I thought was a little off-the wall I cut out. More was left out than put in.

When reading student papers, I am reminded of the "insistence" of the Symbolic order, on its continual return to my looking. It is in the return to my looking that the Symbolic Order renders me the difference that is articulated in relation to other readers of the text. My identifications with certain discursive maneuvers in a student's work is the site/sight of "managing myself" as a marker. Is this "looking at my looking" part of a determinism that foregrounds and denies any possibility of self? This is the question Gore (1993) raises in her interrogation of teacher identity within "regimes of truth" (pp. 132-135) and the regulation of teacher knowledge production and practice. The interpellation of teachers and students into the "regimes of truth" that constitute the marking criteria and the essays written by students are forms of discipline.

Teachers tell me there is a lot of work in getting students prepared to write the Diploma Examinations. Teachers I have worked with marking have shared their stories about taking several days out of classes to coach the students in "how to write THE ESSA?" so as to maximize their test scores. As one teacher described their "coaching of students":

> I'm blunt with these guys…I tell them to avoid being too clever or creative, especially at the beginning of a paper. The first page or so is so important: set the stage for the marker by telling them how much you care about the question. I tell the students to do this even if they think it's corny. My brighter students know it is, but over the years I've marked I have come to realize that there is a basic structure you need to follow. Especially for the weaker students.

This sort of discipline, "especially for weaker students" represents a kind of embodied, tacit knowledge that teachers use to help students make their way through the Diploma Exam essay question. Consider the compulsion of students to write in a disciplined manner in relation to what Foucault (1983) says about the circulation of techniques of normalization in schools.

> First, the techniques of the self do not require the same material apparatuses as the production of objects, therefore they are often invisible techniques. Second, they are frequently linked to the techniques for the direction of others. For example, if we take educational institutions, we realize that one is managing others and teaching them to manage themselves (p. 250).

As Gore (1993) suggests, "regimes of truth" are more than epistemological or methodological frameworks that act as determinants of pedagogical practices and teachers' work. Neither should we construe "regimes of truth" as "tools" that are manipulated by a coherent agentic self that tries to mediate the conflicting goals of schooling and trying to "help students through the examinations." Gore sees "regimes of truth" as objects that mobilize us in the world. There is an avidity in the gaze - in the Imaginary's construal of the Big Other that acts to occlude and immobilize local productions of knowledge. What is ironic, and unfortunate, is Gore's failure to provide an alternative conceptualization of the avidity of the gaze beyond a Foucauldian framework. Satisfied with gesturing towards "reflective practice" that interrogates one's constitution as a self (pp. 150-152), Gore returns to the familiar ground of questioning power/ knowledge relations in classrooms. For example, having student teachers trace the origins of certain disciplinary practices in a classroom or in their practice is offered as a way to interrogate "the technologies through which we make ourselves in subjects" (p. 155). Gore's contends that the "the more aware we are of the practices of self, the greater the space for altering those practices" (p. 155).

What the student essays and their comments about their writing suggests to me that we need to consider the autopoietic understanding of the examination program as a system of communication within the Lacanian sense of the role of the Symbolic in rooting out contradictions and paradox. Both students and teachers need to be considered in this reflexive relationship. As an autopoietic system, the Diploma Examination program achieves what is essential to teacher identity formation: the fascination and attraction to the "constitutive differences" that allow the teacher markers to work with the Symbolic order. Here I am linking Lacan's sense that the Symbolic appears outside the imaginary as a monstrous other that must be passed beyond. Lacan draws the enigmatic mythic construction of Odysseus blinding the Cyclops. Only by blinding the Cyclopean eye (creating the "blind gaze") is it possible that Odysseus may "pass through."

As Elmer (1995) points out, "the symbolic realm of communication is the home of negation and radical finitude" where the subject achieves a "paradoxical freedom" by passing through the "monstrous beyond of the imaginary" (p. 120). During the marking of Diploma Exam teachers are asked to share their scores of a commonly marked student essay. I am aware of the palpable tension around the table as we each "show" our marks. To be discrepant at the table is bad enough, but teachers endure having their marks posted on a bulletin board which becomes a gathering place later in the day.

I have talked with several teachers who have had their marks called "soft," "out to lunch" and so on. I still recall bitter debates I have had with other markers over particular essays that produced wildly discrepant marks. Yet what is this debate actually about, but the contestation over what will become the construal of the Big Other, the "standard" that will stand as the arbiter of the subject's recognition of itself as a self? Contestation is the subject seeking to "verify" itself against itself: the human trying to overcome his non-Being through the ontological status of creating/recreating the "blind gaze" (Elmer, p. 1995, 120). Unfortunately, in the view of Levinas (1987), this blind gaze serves to erase the alterity of the diverse students we teach.

Yet many teachers support these examinations. When talking to colleagues about their support for the examinations, they invariably invoke the wish to 'see better', with metaphors like, "I like to see how kids compare," or "I can see how I'm doing compared to other schools like my own." If we as teacher markers try to blind the Cyclops, we will realize that behind the veiled Phallus it is *eye/I*.

In the marking of Diploma examinations, the confirmation of the standards takes place in the place of the Other. This is the role of standards setting and reliability reviews that serve to remind teachers of the descriptors that indicate the numeric qualities assigned to student writing. For Lacan, the Other "can in essence be determined neither as an individual, nor as a social function, nor as a subject in general. Indeed, it is nothing more than the differentially upon which discourse depends" (as cited in Elmer, 1995, p. 118). The implication for marking in terms of autopoietic systems then can be seen in how student essays represent writings constructed around discourses that students may or may not have mastered. Clearly in the several examples of student work that I identified as being underrated, this was the case.

The discourse of accountability hovers around the phantasm that "invokes the inevitability of a culture always already beyond the scope of the present" (Marchessault, 1994, p. 57). My central argument is that teachers confronted with the invocation of technological determinism live in cross-currents where their teaching is either "too early or too late," where "consciousness is premature or after the fact" (Foster, 1996, p. 207). Accountability is a discourse that locates the *subject of the present* and the *present of the subject* as a genealogy that works to erase both the past and the teacher's embodied sense of the present in an effort to locate a future that is construed around the trope of inevitable insufficiency.

So a central problem for teachers is the invocation to engage the *future* as a presence that must be read, contested and then mediated by the sheer will of rational discourse. I am reminded that "each epoch dreams the next" (Benjamin, as cited in Foster, 1996, p. 207), but some dreams can become nightmares. Consider Fiske's (1996) river metaphor once again, and his claim that agency is not to be underestimated as the "river of discourses" is negotiated.

> The topography of a river may be the metaphoric equivalent of the structuring or determining social conditions within which the processes of culture have to operate, but unlike rivers in nature, cultural countercurrents and eddies are produced as much by motivated, intentional, and interested interventions as by natural conditions such as rocky outcrops or fallen trees. People build dams, sluice gates, and irrigation channels in attempts to turn the flow of

> the advantage to their own social formations, and away from the advantage of others (p. 80).

To protect the habitation of my classroom I cannot build dams, nor can I channel the course of the river of the discourse of the Master. All I can do is ride the waves, darting in between the irregularities in the flow of the river that provide temporary room for rest and navigation. Despite the dreams of the performativity imperative, teachers will never get it *all right*; we can only hope to be sufficient for the locale we find ourselves in. Working through the ambiguities of *other minds* (Bruner, 1995) sits in opposition against the imperatives of performativity. The desire to know the Other, to be seduced by the power to escape one's intractability within the autopoietic relation is the mistake of living metaphors as reality. Rather than living with the desire to produce the messy essentials of culture, what Bruner calls *oeuvres* or works, teachers are increasingly drawn away from what Palmer (1997) calls the "social ecstasy" of the world that cannot be contained. In a Lacanian reading, such an endeavour is an effort to close down the plurality of the Phallus, to suture in the master signifiers accountability and the demand 'to see' students within rubrics of signifiers that are housed, I believe, largely within the discourse of the University.

In our desire to construct "outcomes within the imperative of transparent demonstrations, we are in danger of forgetting the *differend*; a heterodynamic cultural milieu we are capable of constructing" (Palmer, 1997, p. 56). The Greek city state was a *polis* that reflexively construed itself and both I and Other simultaneously. When a vote was taken to go war it was not some other who would be sent, it was the body that trembled and spoke up in the *agora*. When we subject students to such a variety of examinations (with so much at stake), what effort is made to come to grips with the elemental forces of *reciprocal incitation*, one not centered on the discourse of the University, but one that acknowledges the diverse desires and investments students might have in studying polis in a way that invites a plurality of significations.

As teachers, have we forgotten that the metaphors that have guided Western political thought have been embodied ones? The *body politic* could be read in a more ludic frame, as I attempted to illustrate in the previous chapter.

The discourse of the University has indeed increasingly permeated the practice of educational accountability as the relate to the Diploma Examination program Foucault (1980) framed political struggle within the site of the body.

> 'Truth' is centered on the form of scientific discourse and the institutions which produce it; it is subject to constant economic and political incitement (the demand for truth, as much for economic production as for political power); it is the object, under diverse forms, of immense diffusion and consumption (circulating through apparatuses of education and information whose extent is relatively broad in the social body, not withstanding certain strict limitations); it is produced and transmitted under the control, dominant if not exclusive, of a few great political apparatuses (university, army, writing, media); lastly, it is the issue of a whole political debate and social confrontation ('ideological struggles') (pp. 132-133).

Four Closures

The image (imagining) I close with is Palmer's (1997) sense of "the world overflowing with mutual mirroring" (p.56). The re-scoring of student examinations and the 'reliability' I exhibited as a marker is an illustration of the reflexive nature of peformativity as an autopoietic system. But what are the implications for my work as a teacher who is both object and subject in this discursive formation of accountability: a world overflowing with mutual mirroring? I have listed these as four general, if not enigmatic, 'conclusions' about my autopoietic relation to the Diploma Examination Program.

1. There is no debt-free Symbolic Realm

In the realm of teaching, or any human exchange with the other, we operate within the "imaginative structuring" that "implicates metaphor" in the interstices between "is" and "is not" (Coyne, 1995, p. 298). In the realm of pure reason, a metaphor becomes coupled with the object; in the realm of imagination the tension between sameness and difference emerges. Students always complicate the dreams of Reason and educational policy makers. As Ricoeur claims, the genius of human metaphor is the ability to "see sameness in difference" while acting in the world in this suspended state or copula (as cited in Coyne, 1995, p. 298). The human use of metaphor is the ability to use an error, an *as ifness*, as if it were not error.

"Every metaphor is a cognitive wager" (Lacan, as cited in Elmer, 1995, p. 119). The big Other that brings us to the marking table has no ontological status except that which we construct through the Symbolic order. In the face of the eye of the Cyclops, what are the real (eyes) of Reason? What do we negate and affirm as a paradoxical freedom we are given as the agents in the mirror? What have we done to our students in the midst of this cognitive wager? How have we fallen into the specular misrecognition of demonstration with learning (Bruner, 1995)?

Marking sessions are full of situations where teachers impute 'states of mind' to the writer. Indeed the descriptors for marking provided for teachers are embedded with the discourse of 'seeing through to the writer'. Consider this statement from the Student Evaluation Branch, June 1996 Bulletin:

> Students achieving the standard of excellence perceptively investigated the complexity and significance of the issue, often throughout the fabric of their response. Such students were comfortable in revealing to the reader what they genuinely thought, rather than attempting to write what they felt he reader wanted to hear. It is also apparent that many students enjoyed the challenge of composing their responses and many expressed a refreshing optimism about the future of the world (June 1996, n.p.)

This population of the other with one's desires and competencies is certainly the most incestuous ploy of the gaze as it tries to make love to itself. The identification in-the-subject resonates what Žižek (1996) calls the "transferential illusion" that is so apparent in reading student writing through the image/screen of *performativity* (p. 102). The result for teachers like myself is to read student work as an object of the gaze. Student writing will be signified as being inadequate if it does not uphold and reflect back the gaze. Teachers transfer their desire of/for student work through the screen/image.

Reading from Žižek (1996), we cannot ask teachers who mark examinations to by-pass this transference in order to reach 'the truth', for the truth "is constituted through the illusion", through the Symbolic order in which we construct the reality of what is the social studies curriculum (p. 57). Žižek (1989) explains, "The subject is the void, the hole in the Other, and the object the inert content filling up this void; the subject's entire 'being' thus consists in the fantasy-object filling out his void" (p. 12).

According to this formulation, I become as a marker of student work what (or who) I desire, what I lack, what I seek to overwhelm in myself. To alter the student is my goal. I become the altar of the fantasy-object, the gaze that indulges/obliges me to fill a void that cannot be filled. Here lies the anxiety of living in between the (failed) impression I have of what students can and are willing to do and my sense of what I have taught them to perform. Yet I must recognize that "the effect is always in excess with regard to its cause" (Žižek, 1996, p. 29).

2. Mirrors don't contain the *body* of student/teacher knowledge

It is important that teachers not continue to inscribe a division between the strict realism of rational thought that enjoys its own looking, and the Imaginary. To do so is to confuse the Symbolic with the Imaginary. Autopoiesis reminds us that the Other gives us the containment field of what unities we sense in the world. Lakoff and Johnson make the point clearly that cognition is an enacted process.

> Meaningful conceptual structures arise from two sources: 1. From the structured nature of bodily and social experience and 2. from our innate capacity to imaginatively project from well-structured aspects of bodily interactional experience to abstract conceptual structures. Rational thought is the application of very general cognitive processes - focusing, scanning, superimposition, figure-ground reversals, etc. to such structures (Lakoff & Johnson, as cited in Varela *et al.* 1995, p. 178.)

Central to their argument is that humans have general cognitive structures that are kinesthetic image schemas that originate in the experience of having a body: inside/outside, part/whole, in/out of sight, belong/does not belong, and so on. So how does sitting a student down to answer 70 multiple choice questions and to write a 7-8 page position paper sit in relation to "interactional experience?" Configuring students as "writers," as do the Examiner's Reports published by Alberta Education, seems problematic at best. Given the tactics described by the students in composing their response, are they "writers" or, as De Certeau (1984) would describe marginalized others, "nomadic scribblers in the margins?"

We need, as teachers, to be aware of the implements we use to assess students because they are used on us. Metaphors, like other implements hived from human minds, are tools that underpin our relationship to the world.

> The blind man's stick has ceased to be an object for him, and is no longer perceived for itself; its point has become an area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch, and providing a parallel to sight (Merleau-Ponty, 1981, p.143).

The marking rubrics we employ become deployed by the students. Such is the work of the vanishing mediator. Over time we (be)come to our self-same image. Figures 1 – 3 illustrate these processes.

We need to restore our ability to caress the unknown, to touch the world, as Levinas has suggested, "keeping the eyes shut, thwarting the violent avidity of the gaze" (as cited in Jay, 1994, p. 556). Irigaray (1985) and other feminists have taken up Levinas' claim that because "hiding is the way of existing of the feminine," it is important to move beyond the simple exteriority into which Foucauldian analytics can easily lapse. Confronting our desires within our relations with the other, entering into the "not knowing" and embracing the fundamental disorder of things are Lacanian aesthetics that play against a pedagogical ethics. Making this life bearable within the specular economy of accountability in public education is the sufficiency I have gestured towards.

3. We give blind witness to *our lack*

The Symbolic order as an autopoietic system calls us to give witness to our misrecognitions and the avidity of the gaze. I accept, from Lacan, that as I live in between desire and prohibition; my self-sufficient image of myself (again my ego exercising its own prerogatives?) comes to be nothing/something more than error. I hover over zero. Here I read Lacan's take on the human subject/ego – as the split that lives in the play with the masks of the look and the gaze, continually mediating with sacrifice that cannot be made, the reward that cannot be achieved. Orgasm, like death, brings us to zero (see Žižek, 1996b, discussion of the "orgasm of forces", pp. 30-35). But to begin (a)gain. The rotary motion of the drives calls us into the world. A divine madness (Žižek, 1996b).

I remain a subject that made choices between errors – cannot I claim a space as a body that experienced the consequences of choices? There may be no logos, only a body in pieces, but there is something that lives within the limits. I remain a curved space. My I is "an object that gives me a sense of being as subject to say 'that's really me!'" (Sarup, 1989, p. 9).

Autopoietic machines are those that maintain their own organization. The Diploma Examination program, as an example of a social autopoietic system, creates its own *difference* through the mirroring of individuated looks produced and gazed upon by the construed big Other. What I have discovered in reviewing my students' examinations is that I come to hold the avidity of the look that construes the teacher as a "reliable marker." Yet through an interrogation of my reliability, I have tried to skew my looking in order that the mirror not return the reflection that I have been so complicit in constructing. I close then with this reminder from Lacan.(1988)

> What's at issue is an essential (*dissemlable*), who is neither the supplement, nor the complement of the fellow being (*semblable*), who is the very image of dislocation, of the essential tearing apart of the subject. The subject passes beyond this glass in which he always sees, entangled, his own image (p. 177).

One student intuited the Lacanian sense of dislocation within the avidity of the gaze in this remark:

> By the time you get to grade 12 you learn to write certain ways for certain courses and teachers. Now it seems I'm just shuffling words around from one assignment to another. That's hard enough. But on the Social exam there was a time limit so I had to deal out my examples way faster. It's kind of like playing cards without knowing what the cards are worth. You don't know what to hold and what to throw away. But maybe that's okay because everybody tells us its tough out there.

I'll wager the student is right.

Chapter 8

Living in the Culture of Insufficiency

Perhaps no other phenomenon in education raises so many contradictions for teachers than that of technology integration in the curriculum. The call to use computers in the classroom stands in stark contrast to the reality that 2,000 children in Edmonton schools go home each night to a house without a telephone (*Edmonton Journal*, June 23, 1999). The discourse of the Master that invokes the call for technology integration in schools is, as I argue in what follows, symptomatic of a contest for the ways that public education will be represented and imagined in the future. Within the fantasm of 'a future not here soon enough', the invocation to integrate computer use into the curricula tends to position teachers as Luddites and resistant to change.

In what follows, I argue that the discourse of the Master conflates the identification of teaching excellence with the use of computers in the classroom. Coupled with ongoing external measures of teachers' performance discussed in the previous chapter, the discourse of the Master is increasingly saturating the public space in an effort to demarcate 'good from bad' teaching through the discourse of the University. The master signifiers of this discourse include such representations as the wired classroom and the teacher as facilitator (troped as teaching from the side"). Such significations of teaching are ways to occlude the pieces of the Real that make teaching so rich and visceral, foreclosing the Imaginary of teachers and their students. The impulse to integrate technology into the curriculum needs to be understood, within the Symbolic register, as an effort that seeks to button down the master signifiers of what is meant by the "good teacher" and a "student prepared for the future."

The technological imperative forms, I argue, part of the gaze which acts as a cultural prohibition and source of enablement. For example, in 1997, the Minister of Education in Alberta agreed to move away from cyclical evaluation of teachers providing they agreed to develop "Individual Professional Growth Plans," a key part of which was to include teacher commitment to develop computer technology skills. Since that time teachers have struggled to come to terms with technology integration in their classrooms. It my argument that the imposition of computer technology in schools has represented a significant diminishment of teacher commitment.

The current challenges faced by teachers in Canada painfully magnifies the ironies identified for the general working population characterized by two leading Canadian sociologists as an "age of economic anxiety" (Betcherman & Lowe, 1997). As record numbers of teachers are out of work, employed teachers report working longer and longer hours. [1]

A Psychoanalytic Reading of the Culture of Teachers' Work

To focus on how these elements come together at the school door, I draw on a "culturally pragmatic" understanding of my work as a teacher. In explaining the term, I am reminded of a recent experience while house-sitting for a friend. I recall the frustration the first few days after moving in, trying to prepare meals in an unfamiliar kitchen. As I struggled trying not to forget any of the ingredients, I found myself helplessly pulling open draws, rummaging through cupboards full of pots and pans. My thoughts became more scrambled as my ordeal continued. I still recall cursing under my breath, wondering out loud about the "stupid places" various items were stored. Very quickly, the prospect of cooking anything in the *that* kitchen had become a burden.

How does this relate to a culturally pragmatic understanding of technology? Each step in the process of cooking (deciding what is worth making, and how best to do it) is accompanied by a particular way that our physical world is organized. As the old saw goes, "if you want to know how something works, try to change it," so too is our body's relationship to our environment. Cooking, like teaching with computers in the classroom, is a cultural relationship built over time of *having tools at hand*. The tools we employ, and how we locate them in our lives, build the spaces within which we function.[2] As with any other cultural artifice, computer technologies help shape what we become. Compare my experience struggling in an unfamiliar kitchen with the story of a colleague who was trying to help a student build a web page with a software program that he himself was not familiar with.

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[1] A recent Stats Can study documents the growing phenomena of overtime by Canadian teachers and workers in many sectors. Reported in the *Globe and Mail*, July 15, 1997. While one might debate the definition of "overtime" for teachers given the nature of their collective agreements, certainly the Stats Can study points towards the increased reliance on overtime work across the country where one fifth of workers worked extra hours, "and most did so without getting extra pay for their additional work," and record numbers of stress leaves. While governments across Canada claim to support the information technologies revolution in education, their fiscal priorities reflect insufficient planning and haphazard implementation of innovation. See for example, A.J.C. King & M. J. Peart *Teachers in Canada: Their Work and Quality of Life*. Canadian Teachers' Federation, 1992. For a broader discussion of the long-term costs of the herd mentality that led to the down-sizing frenzy in the private and public sectors see P. Drucker, "The Age of Social Transformation," *The Atlantic Monthly*. 274:5 Nov., 1994. For an up-to date review on the Canadian scene see Canadian Teachers' Federation. 1997a. "Information Technology in the Classroom Pits and Pendulums – A Poe-sian Look at Planning" (www.ctf-fce.ca.).

> I'm no techno dummy but I got a glimpse of how frustrating things can be when you are slowed down by little differences in software. I tried finding the right pull-down menu button to locate a *copy* and *send* function to the kid's disc but I couldn't. I spent twenty minutes trying to find functions and files that would normally be right at my finger tips. It was a real mess. With the new version of *Internet Explorer* I was lost since I felt at home with *Netscape*. It wasn't too long after that I gave up using *Netscape* and just used *Explorer*.

Within the Imaginary of teachers, classrooms are embodied cultural locations where *what is worth knowing* and *what is worth doing* come together. [3] Assuming that technology exists as a cultural phenomenon, I draw from Tomlinson's (1991) argument that it is helpful to examine the effects of computer technologies on the cultural work of teachers as agents of symbolic production. Seeing teachers' work as a cultural site of *production*, *reception*, and *use* provides a rubric for engaging technology and work in ways that is attentive to the ways that teachers try to build places of practice in their classrooms as cultural locations that reflect society's definitions of *what is worth knowing* and *what is worth doing.*

The following describes the *production*, *reception* and *use* of computer technologies in teachers' work spaces (the classroom) within the Symbolic Order. The ways in which computer technologies are represented by governments and school boards as a means to enhance student performance without having to commit sufficient resources to achieving these goals are outlined. This process is described as the *production* of the discourse of "inevitable insufficiency." How many teachers receive and interpret the calls for an increased emphasis on technology within a social milieu that is ambivalent about their work is illustrated. Finally, examples of how teachers in one high school attempted to use technology to build meaning (cook-up?) in their classrooms are presented in terms of how social constructivism informs us about the culture of work.

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[2] For a similar argument see U. Franklin (1990). *The Real World of Technology*. Toronto: Anansi Press.

[3] Landon E. Beyer & Daniel P. Liston, *Curriculum in Conflict* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1996, pp. xvii-xix). The authors see these two elements within curricula that must be enacted within social relationships.

Production: Creating the Culture of *Inevitable Insufficiency*

Central to the understanding of a cultural studies approach to social production is the concept of *discourse* developed in Chapter 6. While there are many definitions of 'discourse' in the literature (Craib, 1992, pp. 183-184), in chapter 6 I drew on John Fiske's (1996) sense that discourse is *the act of articulating one's sense of the world*: "putting into discourse" is about circulating social relations and understandings (p. 15).

Recall that from the previous chapter, that for Fiske (1996) culture is "a river of discourses"

> at times the flow is comparatively calm; at others, the undercurrents, which always disturb the depths under even the calmest surface, erupt into turbulence. Rocks and promontories can turn its currents into eddies and counter currents, can change its direction or even reverse its flow (p.15).

Since we are differently located and invested in our cultures, discourse is never neutral, it exists in structural relations to power and economic production. If we think of work as sites of cultural practices, it is not difficult to link Fiske's "river of discourses" with the controversies and paradoxes swirling around teachers' work and technological change. The debates between proponents and opponents of technological innovation in education would be examples of what Fiske would call "discursive currents and countercurrents."

Currently North American educators are immersed in the Master discourse of 'inevitable progress' and a post-war enthusiasm for technology. Emblematic of this investment in technological optimism was Ronald Reagan, who vapidly intoned "progress is our most important product" (Ellwood, 1996, pp. 7-10). The modernist promises of *speed* and *egalitarian accessibility* were trumped when American Vice President Al Gore announced in 1993 that connecting schools to the Information Superhighway would be a priority. In 1995 the Ontario government announced a $20 million project to give Ontario students access to new technologies through the Technology Incentive Partnership Program (TIPP). By 1996, the projects under the TIPP program had grown to include 94 school boards and 200 private sector partners. On March 27, 1997, another $60 million was injected into new projects, bringing the total invested over three years to $100 million. John Snobelen, the Minister of Education and Training, enthused that "the spirit of partnership between educators and the private sector is impressive" because "schools have identified their needs in technology, and boards, teachers parents, volunteers, and private sector partners have pulled together ambitious initiatives on behalf of our young people" (Government of Ontario, 1997). In the Minister's discursive move here, technology becomes the dominant discursive space in which teachers should define their teaching practices.

The Master discursive flow towards computer mediated instruction and simply 'just getting things to work' is taking place within an undertow that draws us towards the possibility for greater surveillance and control within a tighter fiscal regime. Consider the *Globe and Mail* observation of January 4, 1993, that

> if taxpayers do not realize how much they are spending on schools, parents also find it difficult to evaluate how well schools are teaching basic skills to their children... What measurement we do have shows a negative correlation between investment and return over time (p. 10).

As noted in Chapter 7, the impulse to assess competencies and educational outcomes has led to the tremendous growth of the 'language of testing' and 'performance assessment' (Usher & Edwards, 1994). Increasingly, Usher and Edwards point out, we have seen in educational bureaucracies the attempt to equate *getting an education* with *demonstration* (pp. 110-111).

The "Business Plan" released recently by the Alberta government typifies the performative current that John Ralston Saul (1996) has broadly characterized as the language of "corporatism." The document begins with the inevitable "Mission Statement" that calls for "the best education for all Alberta Students":

> Vision for Education
> •Ensure students come first •Focus resources on students •Ensure excellence and affordability •Account to Albertans •Ensure quality programs and high standards for all students •Support teachers' vital role •Meet the needs of students in a rapidly changing world •Involve all Albertans in education •Help students be the best they can be •Provide opportunities for choice (Alberta Education, 1997b).

Kegan notes how the discourse of "excellence" and "competencies" deploys the reified culture of *performativity.* Consider how it vacuously intones that "your job belongs to you" as these objectives should:

> 1. To invent or own our work (rather than see it as owned and created by the employer).
> 2. To be self-initiating, self-correcting, self-evaluating (rather than dependent on others to frame the problems...)
> 3. To be guided by our own visions at work (rather than be a vision or be captive of the authority's agenda).
> 4. To take responsibility for what happens to us at work externally and internally (rather than see our present internal circumstances and future external possibilities as caused by someone else).
> 5. To be accomplished masters of our particular work roles, jobs, or careers (rather than have an apprenticing or imitating relationship to what we do).
> 6. To conceive of the organization from the "outside in," as a whole; to see our relation to the whole; to see the relation of the parts to the whole (rather than see the rest of the organization and its parts only from the perspective of our own part, from the "inside out") (Kegan, 1994, p.37)

Kegan asks, rhetorically, what are we to make of the call to performativity, in the culture of *inevitable insufficiency*, that sets out 'for the self' an ownership of conditions that one neither creates nor destroys (p. 152)?

In Alberta, the rush to devolve decision-making in school jurisdictions through what is loosely called 'site based management', provides teachers with an ownership of conditions they cannot control. The same is true for school boards. The current difficulty for school jurisdictions is that they are totally dependent on government grants for their revenues while being directed to integrate technology into the classroom. The financial realities for schools remain: in the 1996/1997 fiscal year, according to a Statistics Canada Quarterly Review, Alberta government expenditures per student had declined by 8.5% compared to its spending in 1986 (*ATA News*, 1997, p. 7). The irony in the Alberta government's restructuring plan has not been lost on Alberta's teachers. As the Klein government has accumulated higher than expected annual surpluses, rather than reinvesting in social infrastructure the provincial treasurer Stockwell Day proposes the acceleration of the elimination of the provincial debt. Couched as "blue-skying," Day went on to suggest that he might see the possibility of totally eliminating provincial income taxes in the future. [4] Coming just weeks before the Alberta government sponsored its "Growth Summit" to elicit public input on fiscal policy, the provincial treasurer's "blue-sky" visions stand in stark contrast to the grey clouds building over Alberta's schools as class sizes grow and government mandated initiatives such as integration of special needs students without financial support continues to frustrate teachers. [5] The current health of Alberta teachers described in the first chapter puts the human cost of Stockwell Day's "blue-sky" visions into perspective.

In March, 1996, I attended a conference of Alberta teachers on the theme of computers in the classroom. The conference, aptly titled "Change: Catch the Wave," featured speaker after speaker that extolled the virtues of technological innovation. As one speaker chirped, "We are in a rhizomatic revolution where we cannot predict where the great changes of the future will blossom." Someone behind me muttered, "Too bad all the fertilizer is on the stage." From "strategic planning" to "empowerment" workshops, teachers in our jurisdiction have "had it with being 'baited' by the latest worms trolled out on the school board's fishing line" wrote one teacher. The suspicion many teachers have of administrative sloganeering that claims to empower teachers to become "change agents" and "paradigm busters" is grounded on the messy realism of their experiences in the classroom.

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[4] The *Edmonton Journal* criticized Day's proposal to eliminate the provincial income tax, pointing out that "a prosperous society that that leaves its schools burdened by user fees and inadequate budgets hasn't got its priorities right." In "Strong Economy is an opportunity," *Edmonton Journal* Saturday, August 31, 1997, p. A 14.

[5] A recent study by York University researchers indicates that teachers support the integration of special needs students but continue to struggle under increasing class sizes. Separate studies of both Ontario and Alberta teachers confirm that fiscal barriers continue to block reform in this important area. *Globe and Mail*, Saturday, August 23, 1997, P. A 1, A 10.

> I find a great deal of help that is available is usually in the form of "administrative consultation" where the workload falls on the classroom teacher to implement these suggestions. It is "I" who has to look in the mirror every night and realistically evaluate if I have done what is best for all the students in my class. I'm not sure if I can honestly say that I do that in the present way we run our schools. I want to impact children but at times I feel like one of the "deck chairs of the Titanic" (Calgary Public Teachers Local #38, 1997).

Kegan (1994) explains how teachers struggle to keep their balance amidst the conflicting representations of their work:

> the automatic and unselfconscious moves we make to neutralize what we experience as unbalancing forces reveal not the commitments we *have* but those that *have us* (his emphasis), those with which we are identified. Put another way, these moves reveal not the commitments we *have* but those we *are*, the commitments that are 'subject for us' (pp. 161-162).

What has emerged in my own reading of the literature on teachers' work and technology is the need to be aware of how the representations of teachers' work has been immersed by the technological imperatives of the myriad of gadgetry, software, and CD ROMs. Yet, it would be a mistake to see computers in the classroom as an unprecedented pivotal turn in education. When one talks of technology and teachers' work, one needs to attend to the realities of the impact that television, VCR, fax, and the photocopy machine have had. I was made aware of this last year when Gary Mar, Alberta's Minister of Education, opened up a speech to a group of student leaders and teachers with the comment: "If Rip van Winkle had fallen asleep one hundred years ago in one of our schools and woke up today he would be completely at home…so little has changed…." From the back row a teacher yelled out: "Excuse me! That's ridiculous, how can you say that?" The Minister tried to proceed but the teacher insisted on forcing the Minister to explain himself. An excited murmur made its way through the room. The rest of the speech saw the Minister trying to qualify his earlier remark.

As we filed out of the room, remarkably the students and teachers were identifying changes they imagined in schools over the last one hundred years, from central heating, electric lights, the myriad of electronic equipment and machinery. What was haunting for me in this incident was how many other times I had heard this example of the Rip van Winkle story used to illustrate that schools were stagnant. Indeed, the very same story was used by a consultant who was addressing the teachers in my school two months previous. My point here is to illustrate again how language acts to *perform something* as much as *to say something*. Discursive moves such as the Rip van Winkle allegory, allowed to be circulated and unquestioned, reminds me that unless we critically engage the discursive moves of proponents of technological innovation these currents silently do their work on our understanding of the culture of the classroom.

One student told me recently, "I didn't use a computer in my report but I did use *Netscape*." The irony here should not be lost. What are we really talking about in terms of classroom life when we invoke the signifier *technology*? Does it include the photocopiers where, in my school, I copy a variety of textual materials for students of differing reading levels in order to meet their individual needs? Does technology include the VCR in my classroom that has allowed me to generate over 100 programs for one course alone? At a recent meeting of our Social Studies Department I asked my colleagues to estimate the percentage of the instructional time where they use videos. The numbers ranged from 10 to 20 per cent. As well, they could not imagine their classrooms without photocopiers. This lesson is lost to Alberta Education. Consider its preamble definition in its policy paper on technology and education:

> Technology is defined as the application of tools, materials and processes to the solution of problems. In more specific applications, the term technology is used to refer to a group of devices and systems that are used in processing, transferring and storing information, and in communicating through electronic media (1997a, p. 1)

In this passage the government implies in its rather broad definition that technology has always been a part of education. Yet in the next paragraph the government implies that schools have been heretofore immune to technological change:

> Technology is more pervasive today than at any time in our history. Technologies now exist that enhance our productivity and enable us to work and think in ways never before thought possible. In an information-based economy, a competitive advantage for Alberta students will be their technological knowledge and skill (1997a, pp. 1-2).

There is a convenient amnesia in this discursive ploy. While suggesting that technologies are commonplace in school life, the government appears enamored with its own Master narrative that locates public education's successes within the flow of signifiers of *new technology* (read computers) and *global competition*. In Alberta, this activity takes place against the backdrop of rising poverty and growing social inequality. As one teacher wondered, "in my school, if we spent as much on technology as we used to on field trips – now that would be something worth doing."

The Master's discourse of inevitable insufficiency is a seductive way to produce the kind of political climate that encourages investment in technology and reduces spending on human capital. Computers are only one of many currents of change that have emerged in the province's classrooms in the last generation. Alongside accountability measures, the integration of special needs students, and greater participation by parents in the running of schools, public education has undergone unprecedented transformations in the last few years. Flowing alongside these changes has been the assault on teachers and public education supporters as nothing more than a self-serving "special interest group" (Barlow & Robertson, 1994, pp. 222-224). Angus Reid (1994) characterized the "shakedown" of public services such as education and laments the move of educational institutions towards increased reliance on part time teaching assignments and computer mediated instruction (p. 183).

Central to the criticisms of public education has been the charge that graduates simply do not the have the skills and knowledge to compete in the 'global economy'. As Robertson and Barlow (1994) point out, embedded in this rhetoric has been the assumption that public confidence in education has declined and that schools are not preparing youngsters for the future. Yet public opinion surveys and Statistics Canada reports failed to demonstrate the validity of such claims (as cited in Barlow & Robertson, pp. 47-48). When 27% of the total degrees granted in 1994 went to graduates in engineering and applied science, the 'skills squeeze' touted by the *Globe and Mail* and other neo-conservative media outlets becomes a cruel hoax. The truth is that except for occasional blips in economic cycles, there is a shortage of jobs, not people. As Krahn (1992) concluded in the *Quality of Work Life in the Service Sector*, it is a distortion of our cultural self-image that suggests Canadians are under-qualified and ill-prepared for the work place.

The Alberta government has been emphatic in its commitment to integration of computer technologies into Alberta schools. *The Technology Outcomes Framework* due to be published in August, 1997, drives this point home:

> Technology is pervasive and, as such, should be integrated within the existing Programs of Study. The technology outcomes reflect knowledge, skills, and attitudes which will be further defined and applied within the context of the Programs of Study (p. 1).

Prior to the calling of the last provincial election, the Minister of Education Gary Mar announced a special incentive grant for schools to promote the integration of computers into the classroom:

> Improving Student Access to Information Technology – the Ministry will provide matching funds to put more computers in classrooms; establish requirements for technology in school authority three-year plans; develop curriculum standards for technology skills, and encourage the enhancement of teachers' abilities to use technology in instruction (Alberta Education, 1997b).

Reception: "One More Way Not to Be Good Enough"

In 1996 the Grande Yellowhead School Division in north central Alberta embarked on an ambitious program to provide computer access to its student population of 6,000 students. The expenditure of $2.1 million was justified in terms of the Board's Strategic Plan that made "equity of opportunity to access and use of technology regardless of school size and community" a priority (n.p.). The installation of computer hardware in 19 schools stretched over a 300 kilometer area and included the provision of servers in each school; the purchase of several hundred computers over a three year period; Internet access for schools; and the hiring of three technicians to maintain the network. As well as its commitment to computer technology, the school division has immersed itself in the logic of "performance assessments." Indicative of this investment in *performativity* is the Board's "Strategic Vision" that includes a broad "Mission Statement" and a set of "Exit Outcomes" for graduating students, as well as an educational warranty.

Unfortunately for the Board, the initiative, which had been planned for two years, was announced at the same time that the Alberta government announced massive cuts in education spending. For example, kindergarten funding was reduced and teachers were required to take a 5% rollback in wages. The funding for the computerization program was drawn from capital reserves that the Board had accumulated over the years. Forced to absorb two smaller school jurisdictions (Jasper and Grande Cache School Districts), the Board argued that if it did not spend this money now, the government would require that the reserve be returned to the Alberta Treasury as part of an equity funding program to assist less well-off school jurisdictions.

Within a few months what questions there were about the efficacy of this ambitious "technology plan," as the Board called it, were set aside by most teachers and the public. Teachers were scrambling to mobilize opposition to their wage rollback and were active in launching the "Public Education Works" campaign in an attempt to mobilize public opinion against the government's cuts to education. Public attention was focused on the cuts to kindergarten. The parents were told by the Board that funding to support kindergarten could not be taken out of capital reserve funds so any suggestion that the money spent on technology was robbing student programs was mistaken. It would be fair to characterize the position of the Board by the preamble to its "technology plan" that "computers provide an additional opportunity for relevant, challenging, life-based learning for all students, with the objective of improving student outcomes" (Board Policy 3100). As trustees rhetorically asked parents, "Can we deprive students of the future?"

Fundamental to the Board's technology initiative is the discourse of "technological determinism" that "invokes the inevitability of a culture always already beyond the scope of the present" (Marchessault, 1994, p. 57). My central argument is that teachers who are confronted with the invocation of the Master narrative where their professional knowledge, like the future, is either "too early or too late," where "consciousness is premature or after the fact" (Foster, 1996, p. 207).

Teachers as Tools of Technology

In February, 1997, I was invited by the local of the Alberta Teachers Association to conduct a study of the impact of computers on teachers' work life. As one of the 375 teachers in the jurisdiction, before surveying my colleagues I interviewed six teachers in my high school in an attempt to focus on some of the issues that might be pursued in the larger study. As a pilot focus group, these teachers began their discussions with me by responding to the question, "What has been the impact of computer technology on your work as a teacher?" This question was adopted from a survey that began the previous month (January, 1997) by the Edmonton Public Local of the Alberta Teachers' Association. I construed this question as a way to separate out some of the "discursive currents" that constituted the "flow and fluidity" of the unspoken culture of our work-life in our school. We met three times over the next three weeks in February, 1997. What follows is my reading of the discussions that took place.

My plan was practical and simple. It was my intention to use our meetings and written responses to construct a space in the flow of our work life that might allow time for us to resolve some difficulties we were encountering with integrating computers in our classrooms and to help each of us exchange views about the school board's Technology Plan. This approach of linking practical problem-solving with teacher narratives about change is consistent with the melding of autobiographical experience with focus groups and surveys in the tradition of action research outlined by Gore (1993). Responding to the question I gave them over the next three weeks was not a particularly onerous task for us as a group. Several teachers involved "wanted a chance to air some issues," and others wanted "to pick other people's brains about what was going on in their classrooms with computers."

At our first meeting it became obvious that the ways in which the Technology Plan was implemented in our school was raising issues in terms of how we as teachers thought of our work. For example, the school board's decision (following on the heels of Alberta Education grant announcement on February 11, 1997) to offer matching grants to schools for computer purchases was creating a problem for our school. Installation of the computers on the LAN would cost about $500 per machine, not to mention the question of where in the classrooms these new machines would go. An even more frustrating aspect of this grant was that the amount of money allocated would translate into only 20 new computers for our school with its student population of 800. The difficult question for teachers became "What do we do with 20 machines when many teachers do not have access to computers to meet the administrative directive that they use computers to record student marks and attendance?"

This issue emerged quickly in the teachers' written comments and in our three meetings. Some teachers who had not yet purchased machines (about 70%) felt that, getting a machine on their desk should be a priority. Others felt that getting the machines into classrooms for student use should be a priority. The discussions that followed reflected the diverse interests of teachers who were all trying to make the best of a bad situation. A frustrated teacher made the suggestion at a staff meeting that we not participate in the computer purchase program at all. "And lose out on twenty machines?", was the disbelieving response from the school administration. "Not missing out on a good deal" became the focal point of our staff debate – a debate that was very divisive. Another teacher asked, "Can't we cut a teacher aide position – that would give us enough money to buy twenty more machines?" To this day this debilitating debate has continued, propelled by an inexorable logic that few teachers on our staff feel able to stop.

What makes the situation difficult in the long term for our school is that no provisions have been made by GYRD for the purchase of software and the cost of replacement of damaged equipment. The capital equipment budget of our school was slowly being eaten up by the relentless logic of having to keep our school's 100 computers in good running order. So the debates continued in our group meetings, while teachers grew increasingly disheartened that "decisions are made without consideration for other program areas." As one teacher on staff indicated in complete frustration:

> We raised over $50,000 running bingos last year because the little money we had for bus trips for school teams was not enough. Now we are cutting back even on that funding so we can buy more computers. So of course I'll be expected to work more bingos. I went to university for this?

I think of this teacher's frustration and the failure of all of us to realize that technology is not separate from who we are and who we become. In embracing technology in our classrooms teachers need to be aware of the impulses that are motivating these reforms. There is no doubt that the invocation of the Master is a symptom of an imagined presence of a future somewhere waiting for us to find it. The technological future has become an Ideal Ego. The difficulty for school jurisdictions currently is that they are totally dependent on government grants for their revenues; their taxing powers were removed under the Klein government's restructuring plan three years ago.[6]

What frustrated teachers in our meetings was the concern that while computers do offer tremendous opportunities, they also may be taking some away. One teacher who works with special needs students in our school observed:

> Isn't it interesting that we can't get a full time social worker in our school to work with students and parents because we are told we can't afford it? Yet $30,000 for the installation of 10 new computers isn't even questioned.

What this teacher raises here is echoed in Kerr's (1996) research that found that in responding to the requirement to "technologically innovate," schools inevitably constructed rules-of-thumb to rationalize their budgets around what he coined as "affordances" and "constraints" (pp. 22-27). What emerges in schools is a culture of 'what we can do' and 'what we can't do' that pivots around the forced choices that (again) never seem good enough. Kerr demonstrates much more than the strict realism of economic scarcity. It would be naïve to argue schools had enough money before the introduction of computer technologies. Kerr's research suggests that a inexorable logic of technological rationalism has emerged in the culture of teachers' work. One of our group writes,

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[6] As discussed in Chapter 1, Alberta continues to under-fund education. Between 1985/86 and 1996/97, Alberta became the only Canadian province to experience a decline in student funding. Although most are quick to credit the Klein government with the drastic cuts which currently (1998/99) situate Alberta student funding twelve percent below levels from when he took office, Klein can only be credited with "accelerating the pace" begun by Don Getty in 1985 (Harrison & Kachur, 1999, p. 22). When the Alberta government was busy announcing its computer technologies initiative, it ranked third in Canada in terms of its funding for education. (Statistics Canada #81-003: Education Quarterly Review, Vol. 2. No. 3., 1995).

> I feel pressured to learn a technology that I don't believe is the most important thing right now for kids. "Getting with the program" means being made to feel inadequate. I'd rather spend lunch time with my students talking and just hanging out with them than reading my e-mail like some teachers do now. Where is this all going? Do we know? Or is this a dumb question?

Or as another teacher remarked:

> It's not that computers are good or bad – I just can't stand the hype and the promises made that "we can do more with less." I've been teaching for too long - we never do less, just work harder at standing still.

Despite the well-intentioned declarations of Alberta Education documents that "computers be integrated into the curriculum" to enhance student achievement, teachers in our group remained skeptical. Many in our group agreed with one teacher's comment:

> If we are so serious about improving achievement why don't we work on making changes in areas that maker big differences like attendance, getting support workers in for some of these kids? These kids need more contact time with people, not less.

Or consider the comment of this teacher who wryly remarked:

> So I can record my marks a lot more efficiently now? Does this mean that I should give more tests? To read the Alberta Education stuff you'd think so. Striving to be better all the time is great on paper. But this isn't what goes on a classroom a lot of the time.

Indeed, "achievement" and "excellence" remain only one part of the narrative of what goes on in classrooms. I am continually reminded that there is an uncanny stupidity and strangeness in teaching others (and ourselves) that is overcome by reflexively engaging the image of expectation with outcome. The other day I was talking about the federal government with grade 10 students and had kept referring to the "government in Ottawa." One girl looked puzzled and finally raised her hand to ask, "is that in Toronto… I have a cousin in Toronto"? Students enter a world that they find already discovered by others. It is not information students need or want; it is the capacity to form patterns, to form relationships between themselves and the world.

For Bruner (1995), the key impulse of caring and concern for the student is in how we situate the student as a learner "in a broader culture" that is simultaneously inside and outside the classroom. For Bruner, a caring teacher is one who demonstrates an embodied sensitivity to the existent divergent ways of being a learner. A learner's culture is a source of *enablement* and *limitation* in the classroom. A caring teacher adopts a cultural approach to learning that engages a child's movement from a naïve realism (that the beliefs one holds reflect the reality of the world) to an ability to think about their thinking (p. 49).

In the research literature on work, while the *technological imperative* has been a master signifier. It is against this representation of what we must become that we see the importance of fostering a 'learning culture' in the workplace taking on currency. Unfortunately, these imaginings of what the future holds, are too often bound up with traditional master signifiers such as assembly lines, control and surveillance. By and large, while technology has shifted dramatically. The irony of the business elite calling for "knowledge workers" is rendered clear by seeing what this demand is coded in the supplement that sees these workers being compliant and contingent work force. "Knowledge" is in the information economy, a specific set of significations (certification and to serve the technical needs of specific hardware and software companies).

Shoshana Zuboff's (1988) exploration of the transition from the *automated* to the *informated* workplace illustrates these points clearly. She points out that what technological rationalism tries to erase in its creation of the automated workplace is the embodied knowing that workers developed. Being able to do a task was seen only in the big Other's gaze as a series of steps that could be replicated and re-coded into a technocratic vision that parsed human labour into discrete functions. "Lean production" and TQM (Total Quality Management) are exemplars of the effort in management to decontextualize human labour from the body of the worker (Schenk & Anerson, 1995).

In contrast Zuboff locates in work culture of the assembly line, patterns of cognition that are lodged in the bodies of people engaged in their tasks:

> That the worker's body, through the sensual information it accumulates with physical involvement in the production process, remains a crucial source of skill both defines and limits the extent to which the worker is likely to be a fully integrated member of this organization. The operator's knowledge continues to depend upon sentience, and it is the personal, specific bodily character of this knowledge that persistently differentiates the operator from the management structure (p. 55).

Unfortunately for education, within the *culture of insufficiency*, the *informated* workplace has become the equivalent of the automated workplace that Fordism brought us. Zuboff's work is a remarkable synthesis of the phenomenological understanding of work as an embodied activity in a culture of learning. Her critical reminder to educators is that "technology is a place" that we build in a culture over time and not an event or an artifact such a computer that is introduced into a society.

From Zuboff I draw the impulse to engage "metaphor" as a way of reconceptualizing the way teachers act with, and are enacted with, technology. From her appropriation of Merleau-Ponty (1981), I assume a posture that suggests that *mind in work culture* is a powerful way to describe the way that teachers care for their students.

> What defines humanity is not the capacity to create a second nature – economic, social, or cultural-beyond biological nature; it is rather the capacity of going beyond created structure in order to create others (p. 386).

What emerged in our discussions as teachers is the highly contingent nature of our work with students, how caring for students was a central ambiguity that described our work with students that stands in contrast to the *informated* metaphor. The work of teaching, Bruner (1995) reminds us, is the process of enacting metaphors of *other's minds*. Technology might help teachers carry the burden of their metaphors, but it is irresponsible to expect it to eliminate that weight completely.

Blue Skies **or** ***Data Smog?*****: Competing Visions for Teachers' Work life**

Coining the phrase, "paralysis by analysis" Shenk (1997) recently made the point in *Data Smog* that as much as we might hope that the sheer volume of information available to us might make life easier, increasingly we are confronted with the sober reality that "raw information" is no substitute for critical thought. As Coyne (1995) argues, technological change will draw us into new metaphors of teaching/learning whether we like it our not. The issue is the nature of the work we do with students, *in how we are with children*, not the volumes of information we can provide them. One teacher wrote:

> The other day a student in one of the labs was swearing under his breath because an essay he printed came out with the ink a little light. The student grabbed the essay and crumbled it up and said, "screw it" and tossed it out mumbling about missing a deadline. So I asked the student if he could just hand it in long hand. No way, the teacher says she won't take any hand-written assignments anymore. This was a 14 year old boy. In grade 10. So I wonder what we are doing to these kids?

"Paralysis by analysis" confronts with the realization that the possibility for fostering social cohesion is not to be found in the sheer performative processing power of computer technology but in our capacity to care for differences in how we allow these technologies to construct the places we inhabit. For teachers, students will always remain as *other minds* and *other ways of being in the world*. Technology is, as Merleau-Ponty (1981) described, tool use: a means by which we construct ourselves. Consider his evocative description of the blind man's stick:

> The blind man's stick has ceased to be an object for him, and is no longer perceived for itself; its point has become an area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch, and providing a parallel to sight (p. 143).

Heather Menzies (1996) powerfully evokes a similar constructivistic sense of a technological-at-handedness:

> To an important degree, the new computer-defined social relations represent the social contract for the postindustrial era... The mouse and the buttons on the keyboard, like the knobs on a car dashboard, convey the semblance and promise of local and personal control. But on the information superhighway, in the way it is currently unfolding, most of the real control lies beyond the end-user's reach (p. 144).

What is at stake is the Master discourses' erasure of our enfleshment with our students and the technologies we use? We are, as teachers, *using* and *used by* the tools we employ. Just as our hands become builders of our world, the tools we use become our hands. Prolonged use of a tool makes its presence invisible to our hands and to our way of being in the world.

For the six teachers in our discussion group, they saw tremendous potential for technology in my classroom. Technology is not a thing separate from who we have been and who we will be in the world. Again, from Zuboff, (1988) I draw on the claim that "technology is a place" that teachers struggle to construct for their work. As one teacher in our group remarked, totally frustrated at the end of a long week, "You know it feels like I put so much of my self into this place – and where does it go?" Such a question reflects the embodied sense of being carried away from one's self, more than of being pulled in different directions. Perhaps more of a sense of walking into a room that has no walls, no texture, no boundaries.

Central to this examination of teachers' commitment to care for *other minds* in their use of computer technologies has been the assumption that "we pour ourselves" into the tools we employ (Polanyi, 1969, p. 54). I have argued that, as teachers, we become embodied in our work through the production, reception, and use of the metaphors. A *being at home in the world* that we enact through our bodies provides us the capability to make our way each and every day. Because our knowledge as teachers draws from pieces of the Real existent in the classroom and the lives of our students, our jouissance is profoundly shifted by the technological imperative. Within this imperative (S1), we located in the simultaneity of *failure* and *success*, continually balancing to avoid falling while trying to go forward.

> I try to do what is best given the fact that I don't have computers near my classroom yet I am expected to encourage kids to use them. Whenever I have them work on a project it is a bit of a nightmare: I'm afraid a couple of them will wonder off or waste the time. With everything else to do I try to do my best but I've learned to settle for being good enough. Maybe that is doing my best?

Another teacher added,

> With the pressure to get student marks up on provincial exams it is hard to justify spending several classes navigating on the Internet, especially when the system crashes or runs slowly because too many

> students are using the system. Now we can't get documents printed because it costs too much for printers! After ten years of teaching I got a phone in my classroom. Maybe that is how long it will take to sort out these problems. In the mean time I do what I can.

Recalling my earlier metaphor of cooking in an unfamiliar kitchen, I sense for our group that teaching is often about simply *making do* with the tools we have at hand. I am reminded of a student who handed in an essay last month and laconically complained, "This is not very good because I couldn't make up my mind on the question you asked us. I could have put tons more in this from the Internet but it was already too full of information. My head was just going back and forth like a ping-pong ball." Shenk (1997) echoes the student's complaint when he describes in *Data Smog*, the "virtual anarchy of expertise" that makes debate on any issue the equivalent of intellectual tennis.[7] When I returned the paper (which was wonderfully written), I asked the student why he had made the earlier apology. His response still haunts me, "Well you know there can never be enough information in a good paper."

Is the world becoming for students a place where "there can never be enough information?" While some educational policy makers believe teaching simply involves the exaction of performance indicators and the demonstration of 'learning outcomes', such a vision of schooling belongs to the discourse of inevitable insufficiency.

As cultural workers, teachers live the tension between the *affirmation* and *denial* of representations of our work. Coyne (1995) argues that, used appropriately, technology can act like poetry – to "shatter and to increase our sense of reality by shattering and increasing our language" (p. 300). Jouissance is altered profoundly by inappropriately applied technology. Robbed of our own significations of what constitutes the 'good teacher', the technological imperative attempts to produce its own imaginary constructions of the teaching effectiveness. Under the master signifiers of the technological imperative, a sense of insufficiency, that the world is beyond our reach is created: a world that is always *somewhere else* and comprehensible by only *someone else* (the Master who itself is void of content).

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[7] Shenk. See Chapter One especially.

Jameson argues, that within the postmodern, individuals no longer produce works but ceaselessly reshuffle fragments of prexistent artifacts (as cited in Simpson, 1995, p. 162). Foster (1996) reads in Jameson a sense of the postmodern investment in the "schizophrenic breakdown in language and temporality that provokes a compensatory investment in the image and the instant" (p. 165). Whether the images projected onto a computer monitor are close semblants of the world than textbooks is not the issue. What we must engage is the question of how computers in the classroom act to limit our ways of doing our work as teachers. The issue is the nature of the work we do with students, *in how we are with the differences that are children*. This is Levinas' (1987) question of alterity once again. The debate should not be about particular applications of technology in the classroom, but on the effect of technologies to enhance our abilities to form "totalizing, normalizing understanding of being" (Dreyfus, 1993, p. 83-96).

How Can We Build That World with the Other?

Teaching is both a noun and a verb. It is a simultaneity that which is inhered in a chiasmatic relation with the beings in the world who struggle for jouissance. Consider this story from a colleague's school.

> Recently in students a proposal was raised by the administration for the installation of two video cameras in the cafeteria. School administrators claimed that unless these cameras were installed, closure of the cafeteria might become necessary. The rationale given included claims that "damage to school property was getting excessive" and that "other schools were installing similar units in hallways and unsupervised parts of the school." When parents and students were asked if they would support installation of the cameras there was widespread opposition. Several students asked if other steps could be taken to help alleviate the problem. Many parents objected to the characterization of the damage to school property as "excessive." Still others raised concerns about the claim that "other schools were doing it."

From Lacan we are reminded that power is an antinomy that *constitutes* and *is constituted by* our *ways of looking* and *being looked at*. Power exists as an effect of the significations ascribed to pieces of the Real that come out at our subjectivity.

In this school (which is a public space), teachers, students and parents are caught *in being* within a multiplicity of possibilities *at hand* to deal with the concerns we have with vandalism. Unfortunately, by presenting the *non-choice* of "cafeteria closure" versus "video surveillance" to the students, the school administration had lapsed into the very same chain of significations Menzies (1996) describes so well in the private sector where surveillance and monitoring of workers is increasing (pp. 125-128).

> This could be the brave new world of work for a lot of people. Its implications go beyond the divisible, of what's happening to others, into the indivisible, of what's happening to us all, because it involves a profound shift in the ecology of work and with it the culture of everyday human interaction. Our social and cultural environment can only withstand so much erosion and degradation before we lose the capacity to sustain it as a healthy, inclusive whole. Social divisions will rigidify. Cybernetic apartheid and digital alienation could become entrenched (128).

In our school the danger lies not in a distant cybernetic Frankenstein that will come in the night to get us. Rather, the danger lies in discourses that circulate ambient fear and anxieties around preformed activity. This is the point that Foucauldian logic takes us to. As the capacity to survey is enhanced, so do the measures of difference and abjection increase (Foucault, 1980). Certainly the sense of surrender to an ambient fear of the *differend* in our school is a resonant chord where fear increases the likelihood of more surveillance, and where more surveillance increases the likelihood of more fear.

As Ursula Franklin (1990) argues, technologies do not "float freely" in social spaces with neutral effects. "Technologies flow co-emergently within our human relationships. They are grafted on to our relations with each other (p.25)." She notes that the objectives of any new technology are imbedded within the technology itself and, once the technology is created, these objectives become non-negotiable (p. 179). This is a crucial point in Lacanian terms. It is not that technology determines our relations to machines or each other. Rather, our agency or diminishment flows from the significations and repressions we ascribe to the chain of signifiers carried by the technology. Technological devices carry within themselves pieces of the Symbolic order:

they exist as a consequence of human artifice. This is Postman's point, stated in another way in "Some New Gods That Fail" that:

> The role that new technology should play in schools or anywhere is something that needs to be discussed without the hyperactive fantasies of cheerleaders. In particular, the computer and its associated technologies are awesome additions to a culture, and they are quite capable of altering the psychic...habits of our young. But like all important technologies of the past, they are Faustian bargains, giving and taking away, sometimes in equal measure, sometimes more in one way than the other. It is strange...that with the twenty-first century so close on our heels, we can still talk of new technologies as if they were unmixed blessings, gifts, as it were, from the gods. Don't we all know what the combustion engine has done for us and against us? What television is doing for us and against us? (16).

Postman's (1995) sense of a "Faustian bargain" echoes the challenge that teachers continually face with technology, it gives *and* takes away. Again, "these masters – the blind kings – do not want to know about anything about anything except what they can say and see… They simply want things to work" (Ragland, 1996, p. 133). For Lacan, a central problem in understanding human agency was the subject's relation to discourse and the subject's struggle to achieve jouissance or pleasure. To control the world, to contain it within the signifiers that are produced within the self-referential loop of repetitions, is the bureaucrat's dream (Lacan, 1993).

Computers are not a learning opportunity anymore than the 500 channel universe is about human choice. As cultural critics like Williams (1977) reminds us, the intent of television programming is not to have us watch any one particular program, the objective is just to keep you watching. Williams underscored the importance of television's role in creating a semiotic of "flow and sequence" that tried to keep audiences engaged in *programming* rather than a particular *program*.

The information revolution promises abundance and brilliance. What we had before it is assumed, was not good enough. Yet educators can learn something from Williams about the temptations of computer technology in the classroom. I recall a recent workshop on using multi-media for student projects. As the presenter raced through a student hyperstudio project that included text as well as sound and video bites, a teacher interrupted and asked how long this presentation took the student to prepare. "About six weeks" was the response from the presenter. As teachers around me shuffled uncomfortably in their charges mumbling under their breath, I was reminded by what Zuboff (1988) cautioned, we must resist the temptation to let information technologies make *informating* our goal. I think back to my student who had "too many hits" when searching the Internet, and the mistaken impression that somehow "computing" (or "hammering") is an activity that just hangs suspended in isolation from a world where there no one is deciding what is *worth knowing* or *worth doing*. This would be a sad place. Many teachers feel they now work in such a place – being *out of place*.

There is hope. Betcherman and Lowe (1997) argue that, despite the forces of globalization and technological rationalization and the reductions in the size of government, the core values of Canadians such as "compassion leading to collective responsibility" and "investment in children as the future generation" have not changed significantly in the last few decades (p. 43). As Willis (1990) argues, cultural knowledge is held by citizens as "cultural producers" stubbornly "lodged in the historical patterns of power and logics of production" (p. 129). Like other Canadian workers, teachers will tactically struggle as cultural producers, *making do*, holding the core values construed in the Imaginary as *caring for others* and *community*.

The struggle for re-mapping the master signifiers of the 'good workplace' needs to continue. The machine brings us to the Real in different ways than our bare hands do. Each new major technological breakthrough reorients us to our jouissance. Menzies (1996), for example, argues for the emergence of a new "critical discourse" that must "break the immobilizing silence on technological restructuring" (p. 137). Heather-jane Robertson (1999) takes up a similar critique of the way in which technology integration in the curriculum of Canada's schools has been pushed forward with little public consultation or consideration for the ways such policies reflect skewed power relations in the larger society.

Transect

> My hands. My right hand. How much time has it spent in the last year holding on to a mouse? How many times did it touch a student? Even gesture to one? (Journal)

I close musing about *Microsoft*'s television commercial that rhetorically asks, *Where do you want to go today?* Within the *culture of insufficiency*, if schooling is only about students becoming incurably informed and achieving outcomes more efficiently, then whatever teachers do will *never* be enough. In our classrooms, *we should not confuse electronic connectivity with embodied community*. The teachers in our research group spoke about technology as a place they inhabited rather than as an activity. Like these teachers, all educators must continue to struggle for within the Symbolic to repopulate the signifiers of *good teaching* with their own embodied meanings.

Teachers must continue to struggle to find ways to re-invest themselves within the production, reception, and use of the tools that build classrooms as a cultural space. Against *Microsoft*'s earlier rhetorical question, *Where do you want to go today?*, we need to counter with a response that speaks from our own jouissance.

Chapter 9

Leading Questions

> *If one were to remember everything and deny nothing , assertion, directed movement , politics itself would have no possible shape.*
> (Fish, 1994, p. 241).

> *The informational world takes the place of the observed world...things known because they are seen cede their place to an exchange of codes. Everything changes, everything flows from harmony's victory over surveillance. Pan kills Panoptes: The age of the message kills the age of theory...sight looks blankly upon a world from which information has already fled.*
> (Serres, 1989, p. 45-47).

During much of my career as a teacher-adviser to the Student Union in a large western Canadian high school, I have been both an observer and participant in what is framed as *student leadership development.* Trained and practicing over a fifteen year period the *au courant* technologies of leadership and self-esteem development, I have been simultaneously repulsed and brought to tears of joy. My own hesitations about the liberal humanistic specular economy of "student leadership" (as an exemplar of the discourse of the University), are steeped in the sometimes bitter tea of poststructuralism. The "hyperreal simulacrum" of Baudrillard (1988) and the poststructuralist critique of Enlightenment reason are impulses that refuse to allow me the confidence I once had when I began teaching fifteen years ago. From Foucault (1980), I sometimes feel at the end of a difficult school day that there are often no alternatives, only "a genealogy of problems" (pp. 146-165).

I admit to being powered both by the messy realism of working with students in a public school and a poststructuralist critique of discourse production and disciplinary techniques of subject/identity formation. As this chapter unfolds, I arrive at a moment where I acknowledge being tethered to a local situation constituted by particular crises and successes, but find movement in being able to denaturalize and destabilize the power relationships produced in my work as a Student Union adviser. It is within the interstices created by the interrogation of power and its effects that I claim allegiance to a "politics of disturbance" (Connolly, 1991, p. 143). I find the commitment, 'the plighted troth' from Chapter 2, that makes possible a commitment to living in between the modernist promise of a liberated agentic self, and a ludic postmodern paralysis of incommensurabilities.

As my interrogation of working within the regime of "leadership development" unfolds, I anticipate Foucault's sense of an *agonistic democracy*, as an engagement with the co-terminus presence of performative possibilities living within the relations of truth and power production. Power relationships are, to Foucault (1983), a provocation between "the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom" (p. 221). Power is a relation that is constituted by our ways of choosing to act upon others. Power exists as an effect of the animalities and artifacts we (teacher and students) erect as cultural workers engaging the discourse of leadership development and self-improvement. My description about student involvement in leadership development in our school borrows from Foucault's sense of *agonism*; "a relationship which is at the same time reciprocal incitation and struggle; less of a face-to-face confrontation which paralyzes both sides than a permanent provocation" (p. 222).

What I will focus on, in my work with a student leadership program, are the elemental forces of *reciprocal incitation* and *struggle* that Foucault (1980) identifies within an *agonostic democracy*. It is my claim that *reciprocal incitation* and *struggle*, offers an "anayltics of power," that affirms the possibility for describing an "ethic of permanent resistance" (Simons, 1995, p. 122). What I will be working towards in this chapter is a way of problematizing the discourse of the Master and the specular economy that attempts to imbricate students (and their teacher), as subjects who are "mimetic representations" (p. 123) of the state's deployment of the signifiers and apparatuses of *individuals* and *citizens*.

Picking up from Chapter 1, where I began my exploration of commitment, this chapter further undercuts the strategic apparatuses of a student leadership program by interrupting the Master discourse of student leadership and many of its modernist assumptions. The strategy of undercutting the specular economy of *leadership* *development* will be explored by destabilizing the "visual" metaphors deployed by this chapter's very own privileging of Foucauldian analyses. I will suggest, in the conclusion, a way of reading students on the terrain of public schools as inhabiting places that are often unsayable and resistant to the occularcentrism of the big Other.

The Liberal Humanist Signifiers of Leadership

Framing the teacher-student relation as a *reciprocal incitation* and struggle draws on Foucault's sense of *power* and *knowledge* existing as correlatives - they exist together to provide the constituents of social relationships. *Knowledge* is, for Foucault, found only in relation to its uses - in its effects (1980). Student leadership, I configure from Foucault (p. 131), exists as a specular political economy formation of "mechanisms and instances" that accord status and privilege to formations of students as "the leaders of tomorrow." Increasingly, school administrators are seeing student leadership as warranting their attention, as moving co-curricular activities beyond sports and club activities. Labeled the "Third Curriculum" by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, student leadership is a way for schools to help construct self-governing adults (Holland & Andre, 1990), and it is incumbent on schools to develop comprehensive training programs to do so (Emmerich (1983). Consider this claim by the National association of Secondary Principals:

> The indirect effect of diminishing student leadership is long-lasting and will plague our society for years to come. If our schools do not serve as a staging and developmental area for leadership qualities, the future will be served by less qualified and more poorly prepared individuals who take longer to assume leadership and who cannot cope with societal problems. There are strong, hard-working student leaders in our schools today, but they are not numerous. School officials must continue to support these individuals while working to enlarge their number (Klesse, 1994).

The claim embedded in this political economy of a national 'leadership challenge' is the need for continual progressive and highly visible ordering of society to meet what I call the 'transcendental instrumental' Enlightenment project of *inventing the future*. This possibility is grounded, as Foucault (1979) would suggest, in the two great discoveries of the eighteenth century – "the notion of progress of societies and the geneses of individuals" (p. 160). Importantly, these gave rise to a new macro-physics of power, the possibility of exercising control over historical change. Training student leaders circulates a regime of techniques (micro-physics) and subjugations that produce an accumulation of subjects in useful forms so that they might exercise power over others and deploy the "discipline (that) must be made national" (p. 169).

The following will suggest that the specular political economy of a "student leadership curriculum" can be interrogated in terms of three registers: altruism, managerialism, and self-awareness. I will examine how these three registers bring to the surface the "dividing practices" captured in Foucault's (1980) sense of political relations seen as a means of maintaining internal peace and order; and of training individuals to decompose the Sovereign and morphing its apparatuses into the capillaries of the body politic – the citizens themselves (p. 96). In these ways 'student leadership' reflects key elements of the discourse of the University. With the increasing interest by school officials in student leadership, there exists an opportunity to examine "power at its extremities" (p. 96), in the increasing attempts to *normalize* and *rationalize* the co-curricular activities that have traditionally included sports and "everything else," as one national student leadership curriculum writer posited (Klesse, 1994, p. 51). Perhaps, in reviewing the normalizing efforts of leadership trainers, one might trace Foucault's (1980) sense of how human behavior and recalcitrance is little by little, "annexed to science" and defined within the codas of "normalization" (pp. 106-107).

To examine the dividing practices circulated within the specular of the political economy of student leadership, I have selected the *National Leadership Curriculum Guide* (herein referred to as *Guide*), published by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (Perrin, 1985). By cross-reading this example of student leadership development employed in our school for several years, I wish to simultaneously describe and undermine my endeavor to promote "student leadership" within the three registers of *altruism, managerialism*, and *self-awareness.* I will explore the difficulties faced in working with a very active student council in a western Canadian community of 10,000. Traditionally, a school with a high degree of involvement in student council activities, we have had actively contested elections for Student Council positions. With an operating budget of $100,000, the student council has a history of community involvement: fund-raising for extra-curricular programs, food bank drives, anti-drinking and driving programs, and special events for senior citizens. In the last few years, interest has grown in promoting student council activities with a provincial course being developed by the Alberta Department of Education in 1997-98 in the Career and Technology Program of Studies.

Without a formalized curriculum until recently, yet offering students high school credit for their leadership experiences, our school's extensive participation in student council activities has operated at the edges of any standardized provincial curriculum. To date, then, we have relied on a local interpretation of the *Guide*, since this was one of the few comprehensive and up-to-date resources available.

In what follows, I will inject a poststructuralist reading that destabilizes the representations of the "leadership as service" regime – and offer a space for a multiplicity of student resistances, ambivalences, and 'hiding places' that are suggestive of Fiske's notion of *material power plays* (Fiske, 1993) and Jay's (1993) critique of the Foucauldian emphasis on interrogating visual hegemony. Against the Foucauldian spectre of the 'disciplined body', I offer a Lacanian reading of the self as a misrecognition: as student leadership as an ongoing 'falling out' of subject position within the discourse of the University. In this sense, I will argue, the imagined "self as leader" is an effect of misrecognition. As the chapter unfolds, we see students time and again recognizing their own unrecognizableness. Or as Žižek (1989) offers:

> The Lacanian notion of the imaginary self…exists only on the basis of the misrecognition of its own conditions; it is the effect of this misrecognition. So Lacan's emphasis is not on the supposed incapacity of the self to reflect, to grasp its own conditions – in its being the plaything of unconscious forces; his point is that the subject can pay for such reflection with the loss of his (or her) ontological consistency (p. 60).

Echoing the *plighted troth* of Thomas, Sandra and Jason from Chapter 2, the students that follow emerge through the Master narrative of leadership, recognizing the ruptures and their incapacities. It is in these moments that their subjectivity emerges.

Against the strict determinism of Foucault's disciplining of "docile (*teachable*) bodies", I will examine how students and I wrestle within the dividing practices embedded in the three registers of altruism, managerialism, and self-awareness embedded in the *Guide*. With the register of altruism, I will examine how student intentions and affective investments defy the liberal humanist categorization of "caring" and producing the desired *other-in-self* relation necessary for the liberal community. In the register of managerialism, I will read the school's role in equipping students with the instrumental people management technologies aimed at improving the effectiveness of "communication" and "group process." In the third register, I will examine the dividing practices of self-awareness, where students are troped with identities as "future leaders."

The first register, "altruism," positions the student leader within a nexus of group public performativity – "leadership is a group function" (B1) the *Guide* suggests in its introduction. "Sharing leadership, recognition, satisfaction, and the feeling of power that accompanies teamwork ensures that all the resources of the group will be used productively" (B1). The student leader's commitment and affective investment to the group is made visible and verified by the group itself. In fact, the *Guide* emphasizes that the effective leader learns quickly to identify "the group as a group, not as a collection of individuals, and thus can be aware of how morale or feelings of satisfaction can change within the group and affect its behavior" (B2). There exists in this claim, a subjection of the student to the constructed (fictitious) relation marked as *the group*; the group becomes the inducement *to serve* and the occularcentric platform from which this service is monitored and evaluated. The group, troped as something the student leader "believes in" (B2), is an important specular mechanism for automatizing and individualizing power. As Foucault (1979) suggests, "power has its principle not so much in a person as in a certain concerted arrangements of bodies, surfaces, lights, gazes; in an arrangement whose internal mechanisms produce the relation in which individuals are caught up" (p. 202).

A cursory review of the document indicates how the constructions of altruism simultaneously enable and limit the student leader as a subject who is imbricated into a normalizing service relation to the fictive formation signified alternately as "the group," "the school," or "the community." This manifestation of a relationship to the group is a power that comes to the student from below –it is an active engagement with the group that *the student subjects themselves to.* The student is simultaneously an object of power and an "instrument through which power is exercised."

In the circulation of "service" to "the group" there rests the relation between subject and object, a grammatology of productive possibility (service), and surveillance. The student leader acts an 'Archimedes point' (Flax, 1990, p. 27), a subjectivity through which the effect of power passes. "The individual which power has constituted is at the same time its vehicle" (Foucault, 1980, p. 98). Section B7 lays out the affective investment to "Leadership Etiquette", where one is reminded, "a successful leader works for the success of the entire organization and not for personal aggrandizement" (item 9). The student is admonished that if power is "improperly used, this power can be swept away and given to someone else."

The difficulty for me, as an advisor to the student council members, is that of being positioned as someone who both is an advocate and a source of surveillance. The contradictions in this role emerge almost daily. For example, students continually present me with difficulties. They have with certain positions taken by the school principal, they are "pissed off at certain teachers," and so on. Yet I am supervising their participation in the Student Council, monitoring their performance in meeting the requirements for the leadership (for credit) course they are all registered in and completing assignments for.

The students, too, have their difficulties figuring out what their position in the school is. In a school of 800 students, and with only 12 Student Union members, frequently the students complain that they are being used to do "the shit jobs nobody else wants to do." Darla, the Social Co-ordinator, commented at an October meeting:

> Being responsible for cleaning up after dances is unfair. I am told by you guys (on the Student Union), that if I was really dedicated to my job I wouldn't mind cleaning up the bathrooms after the dances. This is stupid – how is wanting to make our school a fun place connected to cleaning toilet bowls?

Another Student Union member, Fern, shot back:

> We all have shit jobs to do. Why don't you stop complaining and remember that it is all part of the territory. Everything in life is like that, a few people do all the work. That's one of the reasons why the Student Union exists.

Doing what no else wants to do is, for Fern, her construal of "service" and dedication to the group. Yet for Darla, her contribution should not include menial tasks such as cleaning bathrooms; she feels her time and energy could be better spent in planning events and administering others who could do this "sort of work." Throughout the year, a discourse is produced among us – coding menial jobs like cleaning up after dances and setting up for assemblies as "shit jobs." Going to public meetings and developing ideas for activities were "real" jobs students felt they should do as "student leaders." In past years, I have found students typically ready by early spring to delegate all the 'shit' jobs to school teams in exchange for funding support. As one student council remarked, "cleaning floors after a dance is work we can pay others to do. If the basketball team wants money to travel they can work for it." There is a locally produced agency here that the students begin to construct for themselves after a few months on the Student Council.

What of the *Guide's* calling forth of volunteerism for student leaders? The "feelings of satisfaction" that altruism claims to provide (B2) obviously does not emerge for all students in common ways. I offered the exchange between Darla and Fern to illustrate how students populate the signifiers of "altruism" and "service" with their own meanings. When students choose to volunteer, and how quickly they 'disappear' when mundane tasks need to be done (like sorting the 100 cases of soft drink cans for recycling each month), are particularly strategic and measured tactics they employ. I have come to see their measured selection of tasks at planning meetings as an important reflection of their sense of who they are as 'leaders', rather than a neutral or passive act of "doing things for the group." While there are multiple reasons for volunteering, the literature clearly finds "an exchange between altruistic costs and egoistic rewards" that develop over the life of the individual in the group (Fagan, 1992, p. 13). Indeed, "to attract young volunteers, organizations need to stress not only altruistic rewards, but also realistic opportunities for realizing instrumental rewards such as job training and experience" (Fagan, 1992, p. 13).

As Fagan suggests, preoccupation with the moralistic construction of altruism as service to the group erases the reality that the motivation for volunteering is embedded both within a complex relation of "altruistic and instrumental motivations" (p. 5). As well, I am reminded of several students who, while serving on the Student Union as "leaders," do so because of intense feelings of loneliness and self-concern for meeting other students. As Laura wrote,

> This might sound pretty stupid but the reason I joined the Student Union is because I thought I could get to know some people. I'm really shy and this it is hard to get to know people. Last year when I was asked to take money at the door for the Christmas dance I was amazed at how many people talked to me. I didn't have to try to be friendly, people were just hanging around talking to me.

As well as sadness and other feelings excluded from the *service as altruism* register feelings of shame and guilt are reported to be significant factors in promoting helping behavior (Shure, 1991, 40). It is extremely difficult, once one begins interviewing volunteers about why they provide their time and energy to a group or cause, to categorize and systematize altruism simply into an act of sacrifice, reciprocity, or inducement. I have found much the same difficulty in the Student Union and the leadership development work that frames "service" as "responsibility to the group." Connie, one of the most active Student Union members wrote:

> I know that I could probably be doing better things with my time. My mom would like to me to stay at home after school but that would be really boring. Besides, helping out at dances means I can stay out until three after cleaning up and stuff. I may not have much of a social life but at least this (the Student Union) is a start. Besides, I really like the trips (referring to conferences and workshops the students attend).

The construction of "leadership as service" simultaneously writes and erases the truth regime of a liberal humanistic altruism that characterizes the phantasm of 'student leadership'. Yet I find that in working with students that they are not simply written-in as the "humane" or "caring" contributing members of the school community - such an inscription of them is at best incomplete. The impulses for their involvement slip under the surface of the rationalist-humanistic text of the *Guide*. There is both more and less than benevolence in their investments of time and energy; there is both more and less than service on their minds; there is always, when they are asked, a cacophony of responses to the question: why do you care? What I read in the "leadership as service" register is a normalizing text that attempts to erase the unsettling fluctuations that live within the world; the sadness and the loss students feel, their loneliness and quiet desperation waiting for other students to talk to them at a school dance. My simple goal here is to destabilize the "leadership as service" trope as a form of specular intervention in the lives of students that eliminates, erases, and occludes the possibility for the life-world they inhabit. Sometimes they help, sometimes they run and hide. I draw on Caputo's (1987) radical hermeneutics to scratch away at a "genealogy of suspicion" (p. 263), of truth claims that offer to *guide* our deliberations as teachers and students as subjects configured as socially responsible members of the community of like-minded rational humanist subjects.

The altruistic register formulates a power relation in student leadership that is neither repressive or liberating; it rotates the student around the nexus of a *self-in-other* relation that attempts to legitimate a subject within a public polity commitment. Recall the National Association of Secondary Principals' claim: the failure of schools to develop student leaders "will plague our society for years to come." Yet, as I have pointed to in student volunteerism, their intentions and motivations are multiple and complex, articulations not of an ethical community, but of a sense of *differences brought together.* One instructive example of this fusion of difference is Ben's claim that "sometimes I just help out to spend time with Debbie," other times "it's because I think the school would suck without a few people helping out." I would code their "altruism" within a regime of an ethically temporary community – positioning student union members as committed within a meeting the alterity of the other in Levinas' sense. Their 'otherness' is articulated around the temporary relation called the high school student body. The 'student body' is an imaginary space that these students struggle to make more apparent.

The imagined 'community' of the high school does reside, however, in the discursive regime of the signifiers of school as an institution. This raises important implications for my expectations about what student agency and ethics. Given that our school jurisdiction terminated the contracts of our custodians three years ago, and that contract care-takers are now working in the schools, should students be expected to "take-up the slack?", as one student asked. It is too easy to read the *Guide's* regime of coherent subjects who are willing to "help out when called upon." It is not unfair to ask within the specular of the political economy of our school, "Who is doing the calling?", and "Who is benefits when we answer?" My own sense of student leader "altruism" sees incommensurate needs and identifications of students brought into temporary and unstable coalitions of group activity. This conceptualization describes students as invested in sites of fractal differences that become appropriated within the gaze of the visual hegemony of the school/community.

Managerialism and Micro-technologies of "Effectiveness"

In my role as a teacher-adviser I have acted to distribute and circulate the colonizing dividing practices of the National Student Leadership Program in our Student Union. In doing so I am reminded of my complicity and my involvement in attempting to produce "student leaders" by the Foucauldian stricture that we cannot escape the discursive regimes we inhabit by turning these loose on ourselves to critique the institutions and relations of our power (1980, 105-107). I feel that what can be produced in reviewing the "meticulousness of detail" embedded in managerial register of the *Guide* is an articulation of the effects of power as it normalizes the regime of truth marked as instrumental master signifiers such as "leadership as managing." Further, I would argue that the deployment of the discursive practices embedded in this leadership training manual acts to mobilize student energy (affect) and inventiveness (skill) into a colonized hybrid that claims to enable students, but occludes much of their affective investment in school life and the Student Union activities themselves.

The *Guide's* elaboration of a meta-cognitive regime for analyzing *communication* and *organization* acts as a master signifiers (S2) that is highly self-referential and thus void at the center (in the discourse of the Master, in S1 there is no truth at the core). There is a crude scientism in the *Guide's* characterization of an organization as a "puzzle" with pieces that need to be sutured together. Running an organization, it claims, is about ensuring every "officer has specific tasks to perform...obligations and responsibilities of officers, members, and committees should be written down, analyzed, and evaluated each year" (E2). To complement this deployment of parliamentary formalism, the *Guide* provides a generic break-down of "Duties and Responsibilities of Officers." The circularity of logic and normalizing deployment of *functions* (of the roles of officers), with *structure* (of the organization as a whole), conveys an assuredness that consensual, rational, and (even ethical) communicative activity is best achieved through "putting all the pieces (of the puzzle) together."

The legal-bureaucratic formalism spawned by the *Guide's* coding of "effective organization" often flies in the face of my experience in the Student Union. Quite often events such as school dances are planned in the cafeteria around the clanging of student lockers; well thought out plans are often changed at the last minute. Frequently, Darla, the Social Co-ordinator, and a few other key members, do the tasks other students fail to complete.

> I don't mind taking responsibility for the dances and doing all the jobs. I know Denise, as President, is supposed to help out but she isn't much good at remembering details. Besides she is great at talking at assemblies so I get her to do that stuff. She helps when I tell her I need her.

So much for vertical lines of authority. Despite the hours we have spent in organizational meetings, delineating the 'Role and Responsibilities' of various Student Council Officers, the students resist being placed within a *tableaux vivants* (Foucault's term for the disciplining operation of the rational classifications of human beings.[1] The *Guide's* claims that roles and responsibilities need to be clearly articulated (B-2 and B-3 break-down the distinct tasks to be served by each executive member of a Student Council)). This effort "for the control and use of an ensemble of distinct elements" (Foucault, 1979, p. 149) is largely ineffectual in our Student Council.

As the *Guide* reminds students, "with the ability to communicate clearly, greater power and greater impact on people and processes are possible" (D1). The *Guide* outlines a series of activities and training techniques that students (and their advisers) wrapped around five components that contribute to effective interpersonal communication: "self-concept, listening, clarity, coping with anger, and self-disclosure" (D4). As the *Guide* suggests, each of these five components need to be carefully examined by each participant in the group, since the inability of groups to accomplish their goals is determined by their ability to articulate the "needs" and "hidden agendas" of participants.

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[1] See Foucault, 1979, p. 148

The managing of one's *self* and *others* is a thoroughly documented and highly valued activity in the 'communication' activities outlined in the *Guide*. Consider a sampling of the "10 Worst Listening Habits" and the "10 Best Listening Habits":

> 10 Worst Listening Habits:
>
> 3. Mentally preparing a rebuttal. 4. Listening only for specific facts. 6. Faking attention to the speaker. 9. Letting emotion-laden words affect your listening. 10. Wasting the differential time between speech speed and thought speed.
>
> 10 Best Listening Habits:
>
> 5. Listening for two or three minutes before taking notes. 6. Concentrating. Good listening is not relaxed. 7. Making the most of the difference in rate. You can think three times as fast as anyone can talk, so use this rate difference to stay on track. Think back over what the speaker has said and predict where the communication is going (D7).

Embedded throughout the *Guide* is an investment in using "communication tools;" circulating among student leaders such technologies as "10 Guidelines to Being a Better Speaker" (D5), "12 Guidelines to Being a Better Listener" (D6), and the "Blocks to Communication" (D8). Students are encouraged to realize that "honest communication" can break down because of the way individuals perceive "persons in power," and that "if your mind wonders to another topic and you only half listen before responding effective communication is blocked" (D8). Students are admonished to avoid "hostility-anger stemming from a previous situation," or "defensiveness-insecurities may cause the receiver to distort questions into accusations, blocking the ability to really hear" (D8).

Yet, what am I to do with twelve eager and vigorous teenagers, some of whom are close friends, one who is a social isolate, another who is emotionally abused by her father, and several others who would rather "just help out doing stuff than come to meetings"? My concern for developing some attention to parliamentary procedure (turning the floor to one speaker at a time, making formal motions), often times seems misplaced and gets in the way of the group members communicating their intentions. On a number of occasions the group would pass motions or discuss a proposal only to decide the following week to change their mind "because we weren't really sure what we wanted last week, besides it was a crappy meeting and none of us were thinking straight," as one student lamented.

One of the ongoing challenges of working with students has been the need to hold meetings that allow for participation and consensus-building, while arriving and some decisions that can be acted on. In fact, one of my own greatest difficulties in working with students is in sitting back watching them flounder and get side-tracked. Yet, as I need to remind myself, the need for structure in a meeting is probably more a function of my own sense of needing closure than the student's expectations about what meetings are for. One of my first realizations that my emphasis on providing a forum for 'rational' decision-making was misdirected came out of Debbie's comment after what I thought was a seemingly endless discussion of a theme for a school dance:

> It was a good meeting today, everybody spoke-up even Frank who hardly says anything. What I really liked was the way we decided to go with the "Cheesy '70's" theme instead of the "Beach Bash." People who knew nothing about the "Cheesy" theme came to the meeting to find out what it was all about. After we told them, they changed and decided to give it a shot and try it out.

Gloria writes about the same meeting:

> The best meetings are like the one today when people just come to listen and try something new. Lots of people disagreed with the "cheese" theme but decided to go for it...if somebody wanted to do the work – why not?

Throughout the year I was struck by the frequent questions students had about the purpose of meetings and parliamentary decorum. I encouraged them to take notes or minutes, identifying who made motions, and how votes turned out. Despite having selected a Secretary, the students never paid much attention to the "minutes" from the last meeting. The motions made were vague or hopelessly ambitious. "Why do we have to vote to spend $2,000 on a DJ if we all agree anyway – there is only ten of us here and can't you see we are all in favour?" asked Diane. After several students reviewed their "Procedures," booklet for meetings they asked "why do you say 'I move to...' why don't you say 'I motion'?" As Denise remarked, "Yeah, what's wrong with saying 'I motion we spend $2,000 on a DJ?" After all, I am putting up my hand to do this, isn't *that* what it means?" I really did not have an answer to this – I guess I could have dreamt up some explanation about "move" being the infinitive form of the verb "to move," and that "I motion" is in the inappropriate present tense. But what was the point? So now, at our meetings everyone says "I motion we..." when introducing a proposal to be voted on. Without over-determining this example, I see what the master signifier of managerialism working to occlude the jouissance of the student leaders. Introducing formal parliamentary language to the students helped normalize procedures for making decisions, but they insisted on localizing their own text of these procedures. There was some satisfaction, I must admit, in hearing a Grade 12 student say at a meeting attended by a local merchant, "I motion we buy a $5,000 vending machine for the cafeteria." The businessman walked out the meeting smiling, and remarked, "Thanks for your business." Maybe he was right – *it* was their business.

Fiske is right when he claims that the issue about Foucault's (1993) 'disciplined docile bodies' is not so much about *what gets decided* to be normalized (as in speech, dress), but *who gets to decide* what is normalized (p. 62). I still sit in on our meetings and wonder about feet dangling over couches (we have no tables in our Student Union Office), with a dozen students slouched in various stages of repose, thinking about their ability to endure my attempts to deploy their accent on the text of the *Guide*. As Debbie told me one day after a meeting, "What we want is time to eat lunch, talk about stuff that will make school tolerable, and get some things done. Why bother taking this stuff so seriously?"

This is not resistance, Fiske (1993) would say, but the "desire to control one's immediate condition" (p. 78). These students do not want anything more than to bring about a condition that they find livable, to do "something that is theirs, that is a product of their imaginaries, and this is applied through their social competencies" (p. 78). Fiske reminds us that their accents ("I motion...," the couches, and lack of attention to formal written minutes) might be responses to the managerial impulse embedded in the *Guide*.

So our meetings remain more like social gatherings, occasions to gossip, 'bring up' suggestions, and sometimes decide on which ideas were worth "going for," rather than 'rationally' considering the consequences of each proposal, suggestions are dropped only to be picked up minutes later. Seldom would students take ownership of a plan or proposal for an event. Events are planned sideways, often out of the meeting. Several students will throw ideas out for discussion and often times speak against the same proposal two minutes later. This is not a pretty sight as an example of parliamentary procedure – I still find the meetings unproductive but students claim they are "useful for sorting stuff out." As Denise wrote: "We are supposed to plan things together but working with us is like herding cats. Besides everything eventually gets done anyway."

Becoming Self-aware: *How to Forget That "Misery Loves Company"*

As if to tantalize those languishing in the pit of self-doubt, the *Guide* entices student leaders with a quote from Matthew Arnold, located prominently on the cover of the "Self-Awareness" module: "Resolve to be thyself, and know that they who find themselves loose their misery." My review of the master signifiers of the self-awareness register traces the story of Chris, and how she attempted to respond to an irate community group's proposal to involve students in regulating youth crime and violence in the community. As the vice-president of the Student Union, Chris underwent an important challenge to her sense of confidence and identity. I wish to problematize the *Guide's* claim to student leaders that "the single major factor determining or limiting your success and happiness is your self-image" (A1). Implicit in this claim is the sense that self-awareness is a transcendental evolutionary humanistic process.

In the fall of 1993, our community of 10,000 was beset by a rash of break-ins and car vandalism. After several community members organized a Citizens On Patrol program (COP – the metonymic slide here was not intended?), the frequency of break-ins dropped off. At a series of public meetings the COP committee suggested that the break-ins were the work of "young people wondering around unsupervised and out of control"

(Although the culprits were never caught, it was later found that a group from out of town was involved in 'casing' the community over a few days, going on to another community, and returning after the police cut-back on their patrols). Coincidentally, a number of fights broke out in the school, and these received great attention in the local newspaper. Two weeks later, a cover story appeared in the local newspaper claiming that residents living near the high school were concerned about teenagers "driving recklessly through residential areas." In the four consecutive weeks the local newspaper profiled "serious questions" from groups in the community concerned about "high school students out of control." As October rolled around, a number of letters appeared in the local newspaper, and two meetings of the COP group were called to discuss the possibility of a curfew for teenagers from midnight to 6:00 am. For Chris, this was the last straw.

As the vice-president, Chris brought to the attention of the Student Union the need for an immediate direct response to the growing concern about "youth crime" and that this concern might lead to a curfew or some other backlash against students. As Chris explained to the meeting of the Student Council, "This stuff is all stupid – why can't we just go to the meetings and tell them what we think." At first most student union members showed little interest, claiming "what difference does this all make – it will all blow over soon." "They won't listen to us anyway," claimed another. Chris was visibly upset and suggested she would go on her own. At this point two other students agreed to join her. It was agreed that Chris and two other members would attend. Chris had real hesitations about speaking in public, and she hoped to let the other two members speak. "We have to say something," she lamented to the group.

At the meeting later that week, I recall the three students sitting in the front row of a stuffy room packed with over 75 people. Speaker after speaker suggested that "only a few bad apples" were responsible for the vandalism and current problems in the community; nevertheless, a curfew would give the police "just one more tool they could use to deal with *the problem*." The local prosecutor and a defense lawyer countered that such measures were probably counter-productive and did not work in other communities. Despite their assertions, the tone of the meeting continued to drift towards recommending a curfew to Town Council. Finally Chris stood up, almost in tears, and unloaded an articulate and deliberate explanation of why she thought a curfew was, in her closing words, "a simple solution proposed by stupid people to a complicated problem" (Not only did Chris hold the attention (and surprise) of the audience for several minutes, she managed to break every rule of public relations and communication suggested by the *Guide*). After she spoke, she sat down, crumpled her notes into her jacket pocket and looked over to me and smiled.

> I don't know what got over me, but I was so pissed off I had to say something. I knew I couldn't just get up and speak unprepared because I know that I get really nervous... so I wrote out what I wanted to read. The weird part is I didn't even look at the paper when I was speaking, I was too scared to lose my place and stumble, so I just talked...I couldn't believe what I did. It didn't seem like me up there. I don't who that was.

I had worked with Chris for two years on the Student Council and I had never seen her more confident than she was after this meeting. Despite all the workshops she attended and the two provincial leadership conferences she had taken part in, I had never seen Chris speak up before. Certainly nothing in the *Guide's* "10 Tips for Building Self-Esteem" like "creating your own horoscope" or "look people in the eyes" did anything for Chris. I do not want to claim "speaking-up" was a transformative moment for Chris – she in fact continues to hesitate addressing school assemblies, but this moment remains for an important turning point for her.

To this day Chris recalls that evening "as one time I stopped thinking I was who I was." As a result of the students attending the meeting, and the eventual decline in media coverage of "youth crime" in our community, the clamor for a curfew died out by Christmas. Yet for Chris, her sense of not guarding herself as much lingered. I have noticed with some awe her growing struggle to "stop thinking who she is" and try to engage the world when she feels the need to speak up. Yet Chris suggested recently, "I am afraid I won't do it again – speak-up I mean. I am really afraid I can't change that part of me."

So the suggestion that the *Guide* makes to student leaders "to find themselves (to) lose their misery" is rather problematic for Chris. It is not herself she wants to find, it is in losing herself that she seeks a new awareness of what she might become. There is not a transcendent self to be peeled away by the technologies of "self-awareness" of "self-esteem," as the *Guide* provides. I resist the normalizing genealogy of a humanistic rationalism that instrumentalizes the "discovered self" as something to allow student leaders to "grow up confident and self-assured" (A1). As Simons (1995) reminds us, it is essential to see our subjectivity as not an ontological form that is incrementally shaped, but rather as something that is highly dissipative in nature.

> Limits are revealed by the lighting flash of transgression through the effort to go beyond them, an effort which paradoxically can reinforce the limit. The knowledge of ourselves that Foucault supposes is available to us is not really an ontology... Knowledge of ourselves is thus as transitory as the transgressive flash that illuminates limits (p. 88).

Certainly for Chris, I cannot claim her transgression as part of an ontology of self-awareness that the *Guide* would imply. That evening she spoke up will remain as a "transitory flash" that might interrupt her old story (of being "shy") and begin a new one. She will be the author that authors that story.

Who is the author of success/defeat in the Master discourse of student leadership? Is it Chris? Who determines her narrative as success/defeat? I ask of the *Guide*, rhetorically: are there no *leaders*, only personal development *skills*? The goals of the group are the group's, *the labour of the group's are those of individual students,* but in the specular Master's gaze of *student leadership* the rewards are approriated by the school. This is, after all, *our* school's Student Council. In the regime of transcendental instrumentalism, just who are the students who inhabit the nexus of erasures? What about their frequent hesitations about "giving up so much and getting back so little?" After spending numerous lunch hours organizing a famine for an international relief program, student interest fell off and it had to be cancelled. Jessica, the organizer wrote, "My sadness about failing and looking like an idiot has no place to go." So, who exactly is knocking at the door of *the self*? Just who do I expect to be home? Is it Chris, the "shy one," Darla the popular and attractive Social Co-ordinator, or is it Gloria, "the one" who was emotionally abused at home? And who (in the school) is asking *the self* to be aware?

Can I ever expect these twelve students to work together in anything that resembles a coherent group or community?

It is in the incommensurabilities or "spaces of freedom" that Young (1986) reminds me of the poststructuralist hesitation with *community* framed as a metaphysical presence.

> The ideal of community presumes subjects that understand one another as they understand themselves. It thus denies difference between subjects. The desire for community relies on the same desire for social wholeness and identification that underlies racism and ethnic chauvinism on the one hand, and political sectarianism on the other...(the idea of community) thus provides no understanding of the move from here to there that would be rooted in an understanding of the contradictions and possibilities of existing society (p. 1)

Yet surely Young forgets the Foucauldian turn that reminds us that any enabling claim to "I" is a difference made possible within a relation to others. Community does not have to be a "closed totality" as Young claims. I would add that marking such a form of community ignores the Lacanian sense of the subject as a plural that misrecognizes the precipitous nature of its own rationality.

As Haber (1994) adds:

> and though the logic of identity understands the subject as a self-identical unity, community identification need not operate with this model. It can recognize both that the 'I' is plural and that other 'I's' in the community are equally plural (p. 127).

The Master discourse of student leadership erases the enfleshed tissues of the lived curriculum of student leadership. Recall that the altruism register attempts to circulate a distinction between what counts as "leadership" and what counts as shameless "self-interest" (*i.e.* the stricture that if power is "improperly used, this power can be swept away and given to someone else"). So how can a *self* be a *self* when that *self* is already foreclosed?

In the spring Debbie and two other student council members were invited by the school principal to sit on a steering committee to develop a Community Code of Conduct. This Code, proposed by the some parents and businesses, was suggested as a means to promote "responsible citizenship in the community and to provide role-models for young people." Debbie believed the whole exercise to be a waste of time and initially refused to go to the meetings (even though the student council agreed it was "her turn to take on a crap job like this"). Since the students almost unanimously saw this Code as a "PR campaign for the school administration," there was nothing I could say that would change their minds, especially given the furor over the fall and the proposed curfew. So Debbie went to the meetings, where she and her two colleagues spoke against the Code of Conduct.

After they spoke against the Code on the grounds they felt is was aimed only at teenagers, they were assured that this was not the case, and that "the Code is for the entire community to remind ourselves what *we* care about...the whole town, the law, and so on." As Debbie told me later, "they weren't going to listen so when they asked us if the Student Council was interested in helping out writing up the code we shrugged – they were going ahead with it anyway so I thought, what the hell?" Debbie's wariness reminds me of Foucault's concern for using consensus building as a regulative principle, that "reason is always impure" (Haber, 1994, p. 114). In this case the Student Union members felt frustrated and blind-sided. So Debbie goes to the meetings, and as I write, she reports "things are weird now...I sit there and we agree to 'motherhood statements' like, we need to accept the consequences for our actions." She reports,

> Last time I went I even suggested that they put in something about the local pulp mill and the pollution it creates. I was told this wouldn't apply since the Code of Community Conduct was intended for citizens not companies. It isn't bad though, I keep making weird suggestions to get them thinking – like banning diesel trucks from the town because of the smog they make. I know I can't make much of a difference but I'm going to stick it out no matter what.

As read back over Debbie's comments, I am struck by how tactically created was her own "aesthetic rationality" – her cultivation of a care for difference at all costs (Simons, 1995, p. 113). Maybe this stands as a Foucauldian leadership condition and style here. There is little that is radicalized, liberal, humanist, or idealistic in her actions – there is a "care for the contingency of things" (Connolly, 1991, p. 383). Rather than get frustrated and angry, as she did previously over the powerlessness of the Student Union stop the Community Code of Conduct, Debbie simply resigned herself to the institutional limits she was caught up in and suggested that "if it happens it happens...but if we don't get involved it will look like we are hiding or running away. Maybe it will die a slow death like the curfew deal did last fall."

Choosing not to hide, letting go of frustrations and ambivalences, and pursuing the localized possibilities available to us, is the lesson that I have learned from Debbie. My first reaction was to get the students involved in a formalistic rationalistic debate with the school administration and the community over the Code of Conduct. I realize now that this was perhaps a Habermasian sentiment of bringing together the three variety of validity claims (truth, rightness and authenticity) in a project of "communicative reason" (I draw from Connolly (1991) here for my cross-reading of Foucault and Habermas (p. 111)). There was, in my claim to the students, the humanistic ethic of "knowing what you want" and "learning to express yourselves." I recall their lack of response to my claim that if "they just tried hard enough, they could convince the school and community that the Code of Conduct was unnecessary." I could tell in their eyes that they did not believe me. I recall interpreting their hesitation as "lack of experience" and "impatience." They did not look down at the floor or avoid my gaze – they looked back into my eyes and I guess I realized then it was *I* who was in *their* scopic regime. I was the one who carried the empty signifier; the Master was momentarily revealed.

As Jay (1994) draws out from Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic*, the gaze does not "see" a given objective reality, rather it "sees" an "epistemic field constructed as much linguistically as visually" (p. 393). While *Language* is not to be conflated as "a speaking eye;" the eye does take up in its vision, "the structures of visibility that it had itself deposited in the field of perception" (Foucault, as cited in Jay, p. 394). Caught as I was with nothing to say, thinking "they were the problem," I simply shrugged and said nothing. In a Lacanian sense, 'student leadership' as a voice of invocation to make sense of the world was caught looking at itself looking. The gaze could not be avoided. I was dead as a 'student leader adviser'. In my own dissonance and ambivalence I could see no point (I cannot resist the pun: *perhaps I (Pan)opted out*).

How can I begin to write about my experiences as "flesh with eyes?" This is the question I draw from Martin Jay's reminder that using the panoptic metaphor should not occlude us from remembering that human eyes always *convey* and *deploy* human interest (1994, 401). *The gaze looks/works both ways.* It was Habermas' own claim that human interests about truth, rightness, and authenticity need to be claimed and struggled for intersubjectively, in a community of others who treat each *other* as "equal interlocutors." I would add to this mix the need to respect the "imbrication of the eye in the flesh of the world" (p. 401) and the orders of the visible and sayable, for together they dialectically produce enabling possibilities for resistance and agency.

As a chain of signification, the three registers of student leadership parallel the Habermasian triad of human interests: altruism representing the moral-practical domain, managerialism the scientific-technological interest, and self-awareness the aesthetic-expressive dominion. As Connolly (1991) correctly points out, the divergence between Habermas and Foucault rests with "their perceptions of discourse, knowledge and argumentation" (p. 114). Yet I find myself siding with Foucault's sense that "reason is always impure" and that students live the antinomies of self/community, student/school, and leader/follower. As I reviewed the three registers of student leadership, I have attempted to show that students have to pay a price for living what Connolly calls the "oppositional practices of those who employ the resources available in their present" and that "Foucault's approach is attentive to those who pay the price of the antinomy of humanism" (p. 115).

Following Some *Leading* Questions

So where to proceed after this (overly?) digressive review of the three registers of altruism, managerialism, and self-awareness? What I have attempted to foreground so far, is that the *Guide* produces an ironic and problematic play between its calling forth of *truth*, *rightness*, and *authenticity*. These, I have suggested, parallel the Habermasian registers of scientific, moral-practical, and aesthetic-expressive spheres. I have playfully positioned the *Guide's* calling forth of student leader altruism, managerial skills, and an authentic self, as a transcendental instrumentalism. In what follows I wish to recover a phenomenological ecology of "self-confoundment that envelops us all" (Caputo, 1987, p. 275) when engaging leadership questions. This is a sense of respect for the struggle in an agonistic politics that students "pay the price for" (to use Foucault's words). Perhaps what emerges from this phenomenological ecology of student leadership is a sense of an *agonal politics* that carries within it a radical alterity, a piece of the Real. The enfleshed effects of the discourse of 'student leadership gives way to a humbling of the humanistic and EnLIGHTenment project of EnTRAPment that carries with its signifiers the pernicious presence of 'student identity' and 'leadership qualities'.[2] As a regime of subject formation, student leadership circulates a transcendental instrumentalism that by and large does not succeed. By commanding a signified presence for the *group*, the *school*, and the *community* (and the ever absent presence of the *state*), this transcendental instrumentalism works to detach students from their life-world. As well, through its "coordinates" of managerial knowledge and functional "overdetermination" (Foucault, 1980, pp. 195-196) of self-awareness, the (humanistic) student leadership project introduces to the students the very apparatuses that enable them to destabilize and denaturalize the significations of "student as leader of tomorrow." Since power lives in the in between, in relations, it is putting these relations into play that students find some sat[illegible] and places to hide. As one student suggested, "It is quite important that I go on the Student Union next year because it is the only way school is bearable. Besides, I get to travel to conferences and hang around with some friends." Another remarked, "Yeah, the free pop and use of the phone in the office is great."

There is in this student's laconic admission that involvement in the Student Union makes school "bearable," a sense of what I would call a *sufficient condition*, a chiasmatic investment that reflects the dissonance and ambivalences of being a "student leader" caught up in the incommensurabilities of everyday life in a public school. Maybe this begins to answer the question why students get involved in such co-curricular activities as student leadership and Student Union. Cleaning toilet bowls, 'ratting' on friends for drinking at school dances, or "putting up with the crap from students who are never satisfied" is part of what they have grown to tolerate about being on the Student Union.

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[2] I will take up the critique of 'presence' in the concluding chapter.

> Some things you do just to get what is really important accomplished. Sure we have 60% of the students drinking at school dances and we make out like no one is drinking, but this is the game we all play. This last year I have learned so much about how big groups work – there are lots of stupid rules that are impossible to enforce. Even teachers disagree with a lot these rules (like how drunk is *too drunk* at a school dance?). Yet nothing is really fair when you think of every single person's position in the school – each day you just try to play the game like everybody else and muddle through like everybody else.

In Darla's (1978) ambivalence she leads me to wonder if student leadership is an activity of putting into play, the play of rules that are – as Suits suggests – "non-ultimate" (p. 27). These "non-ultimate rules" are a gesture that resonates the aesthetic practice of 'giving to the other' that Levinas describes. For students, there is the regime of rules for student; leadership, framed within the three registers of altruism, managerialism, and self-awareness. Yet it is in the struggles and confoundments of everyday life that students realize *they can always stop playing the game*. They can, in the metaphor of the panopticon, always stare back, or run and hide all together (by quitting the Student Union). Denise writes, "One reason I like the Student Union is that it is the only thing I do that no one tells me I have to do..."

They realize that their authority in the school is limited (if non-existent), and that running meetings in a psuedo-parliamentary way is a playful adherence to a necessary but acceptable condition of working in a school group that is getting credits and evaluated for its performance. So, within the visual hegemony my of role as the student union adviser, they perform the rudiments of parliamentary decorum (It is instructive that the single biggest change this year at meetings has been that everyone faces each other and takes turn to speak. This happened because a new student who is deaf (but lip-reads) joined the group. Is this an example of a *necessary condition*?).

Completing reflective assignments and self-assessments of their managing of a school events sometimes requires students to divulge private information about themselves. They engage these assignments only to the point they feel tactically manageable and productive. I sometimes wonder if I should get rid of these assignments. Many students do not take them very seriously, and the ones who need them the least (to learn how to plan, organize work parties) are the ones who do the most work on these self-assessments. Yet, I am drawn towards seeing "how they handle" the assignments; for many students it is a chance to get extra marks if they want them. So, we sort of play around with the written reflections and self-assessments. There is in Suits (1978), I believe, the sense of a radical hermeneutics of the affective investment in not achieving results, but in overcoming what he calls the threat of ever achieving "volitional entropy" (p. 170). In his construction of games as "overcoming unnecessary obstacles," Suits reminds me that the investment in human relationships is about putting into the play the Lacanian *lack*, and how we misrecognize through everyday avoidances, the possibility that jouissance can never be strictly our own. To be without *necessary obstacles*, to be without *lack*, would not be, in my reading of Lacan, similar to Suits' claim that, in the event we ever achieve Utopia, "we should begin to store up games" to make life worth living (p. 176).[3] Here I sense the resonating quality of *plighted troth*. In plighted troth we are committed to the inassimilable in the other. As I argued earlier, it is here that Levinas' ethics begins.

If one element remains in my work with leadership development, it is the remnants left from the effects of the transcendental instrumentalism of the three registers of altruism, managerialism and self-development. The funding generated by the Student Union and its high profile in the school and the community provides the students with a way of claiming a spot that Caputo (1987) calls the opening between "closure and disclosure" (p. 274). In the everyday life of bodies and gestures coming to terms with the flux of the public school, perhaps student union participation gives students, temporarily, "a way of writing the person with capital letters, giving the person a louder voice" (p. 275).

Sawicki (1991) reminds us that the constraining limitations of subjugation can also be read as enabling possibilities (108). As I have indicated, the master signifiers of *Student Leadership*, with its transcendental instrumentalism, its coherency and capacity to occlude student subjectivity, cannot contain the Real. Opening up a space for students to become more effective group organizers or to become "self-aware," for example, produces interruptions in the normal relations of the public school where students are seldom, if ever, given control over aspects of their school life. If this agency or possibility is to mean anything though, students must find the greatest possibility and comfort in recognizing that they are not alone in their frustrations and struggles.

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[3] From the perspective of an Imaginary possibility, Suits describes Utopia as a world free from the need for productive labour and instrumental knowledge.

> Foucault may be correct to point out that our bodies have been made docile and obedient, but this has political force only when we realize that domination is not personal and idiosyncratic, but represents the strategic domination of, and has been instrumental in, the identity formation of an identifiable group...What has always seemed 'natural' can come to be seen as unnatural and thereby as possible to resist, in the process of telling one's story and comparing one's experiences with others (Haber, 1994, p. 109).

Yet, we must avoid privileging 'experience' without seeing its groundedness in the Imaginary. Students occupy textual spaces and places. They are, in a Lacanian sense, in a state of continual *falling out of* and *into subjectivity*. I recall Chris, isolated in her own dissonance, sensing the frustration of not being able to get enough students to speak up against the proposed curfew until she found two friends to go with her to the public meeting. Initially she thought that the problem was that enough students did not care – she later suggests that "I'm maybe like others, waiting for others to take the first step – sometimes it is the dumbest things that get you mad enough to do something. And to think I almost ended up not going to that meeting."

The Student Union often exists as a site of "generalized resentment" caught, as we are, between the signifying practices within the three registers of a transcendental instrumentalism: altruism, managerialism, and self-awareness. These signifiers, as I have illustrated, are like other master signifiers, blind to their effects on the jouissance of the other. As I have suggested, much of our activity in the Student Union has been directed toward sustaining the *Guide's other-in-self* presence in Student Union leaders. The Foucauldian sense of *reciprocal incitation* and *struggle* in our Student Union leadership activities reveals how we are lured and drawn into the draft of apprehension and doubt about each other. The risk of *permanent provocation* always looms in the background. The value of what we do in the Student Union is often shaken by the demands produced by the transcendental instrumentalism of the student leadership discourse which is so typical of the discourse of the University. Student resistances to this discourse, and attempts to undermine its coherency and structures throws us into a flux, openings and interruptions that reveal the transparent contradictions in cloaking students in the master signifiers of "community service" or "responsible citizenship."

In closing, it may be helpful to consider student leadership as an *agonal politics*. To do so draws on a radical hermeneutics to situate working between the postmodern relational self of heterogeneity, and the coherency of students as agentic selves. As one student scratched on a diagram of our student union organizational chart, "we are not whole until the holes are filled." I recall student ambivalences and resistances about being positioned as "student leaders" or as having "authority" in the school. As Darla reminded me, "just because I clean up someone's puke after a dance doesn't make me a leader – maybe I'm a geek who just wants to have more dances at school." There is a playfulness in Darla's self-effacement – she is, I believe, simply living in the "sufficient condition" that allows her subjectivity the "play of differences" that Young (1986) claims:

> because the subject is not a unity, it cannot be present to itself, know itself. I do not know what I mean, need, want, desire because these do not arise from the same ego origin...Consequently, any individual subject is a play of differences that cannot be comprehended...the subject is (a) heterogeneous presence (p. 1).

"Maybe I'm a geek" is a claim coming from the mouth of a very popular 17 year-old female, that might read as a "heterogeneous presence" that Young claims. Yet Darla does take solace in her position as the Social Co-ordinator for the Student Union, priding herself on booking good entertainment packages and "getting things done because I can't stand it when people talk and do nothing." As see reflected about her involvement in the school's Initiation activities:

> As much as I liked my friends on the Initiation Committee, I realize that we wouldn't have raised $3,000 unless I took charge when things started falling apart. Even though Denise got pissed-off at me and accused me of trying to take over, I have always been a control freak – I can't stand watching things turn to shit.

Sylvia Benhabib (1992) draws from Arendt the rejoinder that we find ourselves from birth immersed in a "web of narratives," of which "we are both author and the object" (p. 198).

> When the story of a life can only be told from the perspective of others, then the self is a victim and sufferer who has lost control over her existence. When the story of a life can only be told from the standpoint of the individual, then such a self is a narcissist and a loner who may have attained autonomy without solidarity. A coherent sense of self is attained with the successful integration of autonomy and solidarity, or with the right mix of justice and care (p. 198).

So I have to be wary of over-determining difference and heterogeneity as markers for student leadership identity. There is a sense from much of what students have shared about their involvement in student leadership, that they do not identify with being written as "student leaders" or having any 'authority' positions in the school. There runs a sense of "getting by" and creating for themselves "sufficient conditions" in order to make school bearable. As Simons (1993) suggests, Foucault's "passion" was for "a politics that embraces what cannot be finalized and what cannot be solved. The politics implicit in his thought would encompass the two poles to which he was tempted: unbearable lightness and unbearable heaviness" (p. 124). For student leaders in our school, for now, perhaps making school more bearable is quite enough. But what of me?

At this juncture I am not sure about my location in this work – caught in between wanting to make things work for students and problematizing my efforts to do so. I guess Gore (1993) says it well when she talks about efforts of critical pedagogues "to style themselves toward different kinds of beings" (p. 117). The concluding chapter visits this question more directly. I do draw from my experiences with these students what Jay (1994) observes: we need to "weaken the premise of focussing so insistently on the negative side of the enLIGHTenment" (p. 593). As these students continually demonstrated to me, their agonal struggles within the hubris of modernity is played out where modernity was first inscripted: on the sites/sights of individual bodies.

Again, drawing from Levinas, we need to touch the world back, "keeping the eyes shut, thwarting the avidity of the gaze (as cited in Jay, 1994, p. 556). Making this life a sublime object of possibility is the aesthetic practice of recognizing the plurality of the Phallus. Through the cultural praxis of cloaking and re-cloaking the Phallus, students make their possible. It is in localized contact with each other that an agonal politics can be realized.

I recall Darla, when I asked her what she felt about students who thought she was a geek for being on the student union. She shrugged and said, "Who cares... *aren't we all posers*? All that matters is that we have fun together and have some good times. Even if school sucks big time I enjoy hanging around." While I resist the Darla's sullen resignation in 'hanging around', I share Gore's (1993) mourning for the loss of "innocence," while also being "exhilarated" at the prospect of seeing "new spaces of freedom" (p. 156) amidst the students' over-riding sense of being losers and posers. As with these students, in failures I find possibility.

Chapter 10

Living (In)Accesses

I finish where I began. From the outset I drew on the claim by Bracher (1993) that the project of building a psychoanalytic cultural critique was driven not by the need to generate more knowledge, but by the demand for social improvement. After this long journey over the four locations of commitment, what have I found? More importantly, what have I changed? How is my sense of commitment implicated by the four sights/sites I have described? In what ways do each of these four sights/sites look awry at me and my question about teacher commitment?

From the outset the notion of 'finding commitment' is coded with the sub-text that it was an object that was some how lost. In my first chapter I suggested that *plighted troth* is a way of imagining the impossibility of ever finding the object of one's commitment. Commitment, I construed, was realized through a radical contingency, being touched perhaps by a piece of the Real. This sense of p*lighted troth* suggests we do not find commitment, it finds us.

Teacher commitment as a trope within a psychoanalytic cultural critique recognizes the need to abandon the Enlightenment project of finding the self, our own identity, in the spectral economy of *looking*. Following Lacan, I reject notions of *identity* because such a signifier all too often bears witness to the perniciousness of presence. Living in the truth of one's self is to find comfort in the interior, in the 'center' of something. It from this place, this center, that the *cogito* enjoys itself too much. For Lacan the 'strong ego' was a cultural symptom that ought to be avoided.[1] As I have argued throughout these chapters, psychoanalysis is useful as a cultural critique because it offers ways to be intensely dis/connected from the demands one makes on 'one's self' about teaching.[2] Such an approach to teaching leaves a sense of everything being simultaneously very close together and very far apart is indicative of the experience of many teachers today.

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[1] I draw this observation from Foster (1996). Foster writes of Lacan's rejection of the "armour of an alienating identity" that draws its strength from a narcissistic shield (p. 210).

[2] I am indebted here to Foster (1996). In many ways, I draw on his treatment of the vectors of the Real as ways of informing a postmodern aesthetic and agency (p. 231).

The sense of everything being so close together is an opening for questions about the relation between the Ego Ideal and Ideal Ego. Reduced to its kernel, my argument will be that psychic images of distance are helpful in puzzling through a sense of teacher commitment.

For Shotter (1993), "to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life" (p. 232). Shotter nicely frames the role of the Symbolic in the construal of the psychic demand. As I have illustrated in previous chapters, the discourse of the University that has infused much of teachers' work carries chains of signification that work to form the jouissance of Reason: to build a world as an object of the gaze of an idealized cogito. Within the spectral economy of this gaze, like many teachers who claim to be helping professionals, I remain *subject to* and *subject of* the enunciation to "make things better." But the Real does not want to get better. The Real does not lack.

To consider this problem in a more particular way, let us consider the common pedagogical question: *how close should I get to my* students? Of course, we cannot always choose how close we get to our students. To be open to otherness in the way that Levinas (1987) frames *altrui* is to open up to a piece of the Real. Just how well we know our students depends on the symbolic regime through which we represent them through. Only the contingency of the Real can gesture to us the response to the question: how close is close enough? My twenty years as a teacher have not been of much help in answering the question: why do some students open up to some teachers and not to others? How do we know what the Other wants from us? The answer has to do with achieving the right distance. A useful image here is what fractal geometry tells us in answer to the question: how long is a coastline around an island whose perimeter is matter-of-factly stated in atlas as 1,000 kilometers? Yet the answer is also dependent on the means of measurement: from a satellite picture using kilometers as a signifier of distance, the coastline might be 1,000 kilometers. But moving in closer walking the beach and attempting to measure every bend and twist as the waves rolled in, we would soon find the coastline is much longer. In fact down to the sub-atomic level, the coastline is infinitely long.

I am indebted to Peter Taubman's (1992) reflections about his conflictual attractions and investments as a teacher (pp. 216-233). We cannot hope to ever completely resolve the contradictions that infect our commitments as teachers. In fact, for Taubman, teaching's main task is "to infect others with our perplexity" (p. 233). Taubman writes about the temptations to be positioned as the 'one who knows', of the difficulties of being taken with a student, of the fears and doubts that he cannot readily admit to himself.

> What I am suggesting is that there occurs in the classroom, the realm of necessity, a dialectic between two lines of thought whose end points must be attended to but not submitted to. This dialectic entails moving back to that moment when our identity as teacher first congealed in the gaze of the Other, not in order to dissolve that identity, but to enrich it; not in order to free a desire to which we will be a slave, but to understand, accept, and acknowledge the needs that, when forced into intentions, spill out into desire. It entails a regression, but one in which we never lose sight of the Good as we give respect to the unconscious. It entails turning our backs on the mirror and facing the person in whose gaze we came to be a teacher and acknowledging, without falling prey to, the needs of that person (p. 232).

Taubman reminds me that I remain caught in the possibility of 'falling prey' to three vectors of a subjectivity: the imaginings of *what I was*, the fantasy of *what I am*, and the hope of *what I will become*. The suture that draws these three impulses together is expectation. Circulating around this expectation is anxiety. Anxiety is a demand that does not know its object.

So *where* and *how* can one be committed in the postmodern condition of late capitalism where expectation and anxiety have reached hysterical proportions? Certainly Zen Buddhism and its reminder of the incommensurable nature of language and representation resonates a Lacanian gesture some have taken up. Thich Nhat Hanh (1995) is one of the growing number of writers you have put forward the possibility of spirituality as a way out of the intransigence of desire. Yet, as I have argued throughout these chapters, there is no way around desire except passing 'through it', living what

Žižek (1997) frames as "the plague of fantasy." We cannot escape desire since it hovers around a null point anyway. Desire, Žižek, reminds us, desires nothing but desire. As teachers, we can dislodge our subjectivity from the pathologies of the culture of performance by re-representing our work and relations with students in ways that repopulating the representations of 'good teaching' with new meanings. Much of the work I have shared with colleagues in these chapters gestures towards this project of rejecting the "imaginary reductionism" of the discourse of the University and the Master that has taken precedence in public schools.

There are no methods to be modeled or imitated. Each of us must find our own ways to work through the assimilating effects of the master signifiers of performance and excellence. Construing my 'self' as a *self* means that I am continually a body out of place, a body in error. My commitments live, as do those of many of my students, in the impossible balance of this remnant, this subjectivity that lives the traumatic (im)pacts: a body that "persistently wanders, as a foreign body, through the psychic and somatic systems" (Bronfen, 1998, p. 21).

Action research has provided me with the possibility of writing and living within the space that Taubman frames as 'achieving the right distance'. In what follows, I wish to read action research, infused by poststructuralist interest in how language effects our being in the world, as a possibility for 'living the right distance'.

Earlier I drew from Taubman the sense that maintaining the right distance is an act of standing both inside and apart. The previous chapters have illustrated that such a location calls for an aesthetics that Levinas (1987) frames as living with the difference of the Other. Such a practice is one that draws on a Lacanian project that interrogates the possibility of the ego as a split that stands both *apart* and *a part* (or *in several parts*).[3] Throughout these chapters I have struggled with the questions of appropriate teaching practice. Questions of ethics allude 'whole answers' since the other (who calls us to act ethically) remains always at a distance and a-part. So too is my (w)riting, my search for commitment. Perhaps reading action research within a psychoanalytic turn invites us to consider the other's judgement of one's narrative as Žižek would of the orgasm: as the *letter/come* to be delivered by the other who desires (a piece of) me (for example see Žižek, 1996b, pp. 2-5).

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[3] In this frame, consider the young male teacher who finds himself flirting with a senior female student. The question, 'should I get closer to this student?' is answered by both Lacan and Levinas. To pursue a romantic relationship with this student would be to assume a narcissistic relationship with the student. Such a relation is one that construes the other as an object for me. The difficulty here of course, is that Lacan was infamous for flirting with his own students who trained under him.

What I have indicated throughout the previous chapters is the central question of the split between self and other in teaching. At its elemental level this split is the necessary coupling that makes the pedagogical relation interested in the role that forms of representation play in our relation to students as others.

A powerful example of the dangers of forms of representation over-powering the forms of life they are supposed to house is the invocation to increase the presence of computers in the classroom. As I indicated just as the discourses of the Master and the University work to legitimate the increased use of computers in schools, so too do the computers act as a prosthesis, a way to further establish a distance between the classroom and schooling as a social institution.

There is an uncanny scene in the movie *Jurassic Park* after we witness the birth of a baby raptor. The "keepers" of the park assure the skeptical scientist, played by Jeff Goldblum, that since there are no female dinosaurs in the park, there will be no unplanned births. In a gesture to the Real, the scientist responds plaintively, "But life always find a way." Action research informed by psychoanalysis is a recognition that we are continually touched by the Real. As a result we are ethically called to continually locate "a place of departure" (Britzman, 1991, p. 56) to find a way that our lives might continue.

Hesitations about (becoming) answering machines

Reason remains a presence that whispers coherence in my ears. My abandonment of Laurie, teaching women's studies, my work in media literacy and student leadership, reminds me that there was and is an intense dis/connectedness in the four locations I reviewed. My psychic investment in the *Supermodels* video (of wanting to save the world and yet retain erotic fantasies as a heterosexual male), was but one example of the inassimilableness of being a 'reasonable' professional. I am also complicit in circulating the discourse of the Master as I participated in the development and administration of a high stakes testing program. As the last chapter indicated, I am further implicated by the modernist project of 'student leadership'. The promise of the *I/eye*, invoked through Enlightenment reason, remains a lingering presence. I remain intensely dis/connected to the world, to the artifice and artifacts that characterize the postmodern condition. Yet the Real always reaches out to touch us in new ways, in ways that I cannot possibly answer.

Reflections on answering machines and other moments of the sublime nature of the recorded greeting:

> Increasingly I have become aware of my own difficulties responding to telephone answering machines. When I call a friend, I look forward to hearing a familiar voice on the other end. Instead, a recording, "I'm not in right now..."
>
> There is an absent presence – a piece of the Real here. How come they are not in right now? An impossible question from the call(er) that wants to 'collar' the other.
>
> I am struck by the range of my reactions: sometimes deep disappointment, often sullen resistance by hanging up. The odd time I leave a message it is usually disjointed and confused – I hear myself trying to have a conversation with some hypertrophied sense of an *Other*. I try to sound happy to be talking to a machine – I attempt to construct a narrative ("I called but you weren't in...") but nothing seems sufficient. (Journal)

What I am given by the recorded message "I am not in right now" is a gesture of the inadequacy of the object of my demand. I want to help students. I want to be a good teacher. I want...

> So far as the subject's needs are subjected to demand they return to him alienated. That which is thus alienated in needs constitutes a primal repression, an inability...to be articulated in demand, but it reappears in something it gives rise to, that which presents itself...as desire (Lacan, 1972, p. 286).

It is through these craven images, these demands, that my Ego Ideal falls short of the jouissance I imagine for the Ideal Ego, the big Other. Yet I continue like many teachers do. I find hope in the gaps and eruptions that make teaching intensely dis/connected. In the classroom under the Master/University discourses, the exclusions of the Real, what is excluded from language returns to erode the interior (Apollon, in Apollon and Feldstein, 1996, p. xx).

Action research, infused with psychoanalysis, can draw this crucial lesson from Lacan: the object of our desire loses itself in the hole of *objet a.* As it loses its 'material weight' – its preponderance draws us into the world (Žižek, 1994, p. 26). In "leaving a message," in this (w)hole I lose my balance, my right distance from the fallen out *objet a* I momentarily fall in as I lose my center of gravity. Why are these contrivances called "answering machines" anyway? They do not respond to the caller but to the ringing of the phone. We mistake the activation of the machine by the ringing as a response to our call. The machine's activation as a piece of the Real is a gesture we cannot fully acknowledge. We stumble, we try to find our voice, to give up a part of our intention to the machine. Yet, in the end, we are duped, left mute at the sight/site of ourselves talking to a machine that (in the Real) derives its jouissance from responding to the ringing. We fall out of the con(versation). We remain failed in the presence of the machine (as an other) that waits while it is recording our message. It then silently waits for the next ring.

The Plurality of the Phallus in *Life is Beautiful*

It is the limitation of reason that preserves the subject. Failure is the beginning of our subjectivity. It is the realization of our limitations and misrecognitions that gives us the capacity to fulfill the promise of being human.

Much of what I have tried to illustrate in the previous chapters is a recognition of the parts of jouissance that are deemed impossible by the normalizing discourse of the Master and the University. This denied object, becomes for students "the cause of the subject's desire" (Apollon, in Apollon and Feldstein, 1996, p. xx). The same can be said for my search for teacher commitment. Despite looking for it here in these pages, in this study it remains out there, a radical alterity. In this sense efforts to locate commitment (or to normalize any aspect of teaching) is to be in danger of trying to suture in master signifiers such as *hope*, *re-inventing yourself*, and *empowerment*, into a Lacanian reading of teacher commitment. Such a project must be avoided. It was Freud who believed that the constant wound on the discourse of the Master was the subject (Apollon, in Apollon and Feldstein, 1996, p. xx).

Part of the gift of failure is that we will remain as other to ourselves, split subjects. Despite the best efforts of some to organize teaching into a fixed set of representations, teachers remain caught in the antinomy of the real and representational 'truth'. As representation tries to construe the Real, it is in the sites/sights of its failures that commitment is found. These occasions can be anticipated but cannot be prepared for. As Apollon reminds us, "the real is the jouissance left stranded owing to language" (Apollon, in Apollon and Feldstein, 1996, p. xx). It is in these pieces of the Real that we find occasions for engagement with the alterity of the other. A giving in to the difference that is inassimilable. This is where commitment begins.

It is to the formation of the sufficient self, the 'good enough teacher', that psychoanalysis raises possibilities for reimagining *teacher competency* and *excellence* as a psychic work of commitment informed by Lacanian cultural critique. As teachers, we live stubbornly lodged in the gaze of the big Other. Yet we can continue. We live a divine madness, a radical virtualization of ontology and ethics. Such an ethics was offered in the film *Life is Beautiful*.

Directed by Roberto Benigni, the film traces the comic-tragedy story of Guido, an Italian Jew who is incarcerated with his young boy (Joshua) and wife Dora in a concentration camp near the end of World War II. The first half of the film is a celebration of love and the romantic possibility. Guido is a clown and social outcast: his (mis)adventures include Chaplin-like confrontations with a local fascist town official. Guido's ultimate coup occurs when he rescues Dora from an impending unhappy marriage to the villainous bureaucrat. Guido momentarily robs the jouissance of the official by running off with Dora. They live a life of bliss for seven years.

The dream soon becomes a nightmare. Guido and Joshua are rounded up and put on a train for the death camps. Dora, who is not Jewish, is not incarcerated but catches up with the train and insists on being put on board anyway. Arriving at the camp, Guido recognizes the difficulty of the situation. Children and the old are quickly segregated and killed. Realizing he must do something, Guido constructs an elaborate fiction that the camp is part of a game. The object of the game is for the adults to follow the instructions of the guards to the letter and for the children to stay hidden. Everyone is in a race to get 1,000 points, Guido tells his son. Joshua is continually reminded that he must stay hidden and do everything he is told, or he will not win the tank.

As seemingly hopeless as the situation is, Guido finds purpose in the dedication he has to one cause, one that is of saving the lives of his son and wife.[4] The game of 'winning the tank' becomes a way of overcoming what Foster (1996) characterizes as the ego sensing that it is about to be shattered (p. 210). Drawing from Lacan, I read the game of winning the tank is a gesture to the Imaginary fullness of the infant.[5] Seeing ourselves in the image (of the jouissance of the boy riding the tank at the conclusion) is a buffer against the retroactive fantasy of the body torn in pieces: the death camp.[6]

Gabriel Marcel (1961) lamented, it is the children who hope, the adults that manage.

> Hope is indefatigable. Fatigue is bound up with work and work implies a thought which is obstinately fixed on an end, but which is by the same token a calculating thought, which knows the slender means and manages them accordingly. But hope consider that we have the whole of life ahead of us. As it is wrong. As it right. (pp. 277-285.)

For van Manen (1985), "hope means commitment" to the possibility that despite the sometimes unbearable forms of life that children find adults have created, a teacher's life recalls that "hope implies life commitment and work," infused by the knowledge "in ourselves that life is bearable" (pp. 42-44). The gift of failure, I have suggested, allows us to see *troth* as a form of commitment that is a syncretic language of hope that can help to create alliances for teachers.

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[4] The film has stirred much controversy. One charge is that Benigini is making light of the Holocaust, diminishing the hardships people endured. One reading that I draw on is that of Richard Ebert (1998, *Chicago Sun-Times*, October 10) who sees Guido as a clown figure who is using the only agency he has, that of his humour. Ebert writes, "If he had a gun, he would shoot the fascists. If he had an army he would destroy them. He is a clown, and comedy is his weapon."

[5] It is worth noting here the metonymic quality of *tank* here. *Tank* draws its origins from *estanque* (to stop the flow out of) (Oxford English Dictionary). All entry into the symbolic is through the death drive. For Joshua and the viewers looking at his having made it out of the camp, we remain caught in the double misrecognition. The tank cannot contain the Real forever. The *Thing* will return.

[6] Of course, the image of Joshua riding in the tank at the conclusion of the film is a return of the imagined fullness of the infant. It is important to note the re-entry of the new master signifiers here: the American GI and the (good) machine – the tank. These signifiers momentarily sustain the escape of our 'hope' into the Imaginary.

A second reading of Guido's game can be seen through the Lacanian aesthetic of the "efficiency of the signifier" (Žižek, 1998, p. 253). Our symbolic world is experienced as a pandemonium of competing forces (words, phrases, ontological relations) that struggle for coordination with our body's experience of the world. As Žižek's claims, language is ultimately parasitic. Not only do human beings use language, but "language uses human beings to replicate and expand itself" (p. 254). The vanishing mediator (described in relation to the construal of "assessment standards" in Chapter 7) plays a critical role in the construction of signification and affective investment in narrative lines. As Žižek reminds us, it is the capacity to attach ourselves to "centers of gravity" that makes human consciousness possible. This center of gravity is necessary to escape psychosis: we must repress some attachments to signifiers and affirm others.

It is the capacity to attach ourselves to "a center of a narrative gravity" that makes commitment possible. Against the comic-hero of Guido, we see Doctor Lessing, who befriends him early in the film. The doctor is obsessed by word plays and riddles and finds Guido a real mentor in solving enigmatic puzzles. Guido and Doctor Lessing meet again in the camp; this time the doctor is in a position of authority and can easily help Guido and his family. It turns out, however, that Doctor Lessing is more interested in having Guido help him solve more absurd word puzzles then saving Guido and his family. Driven by the need to solve these puzzles the doctor complains to Guido that he is unable to sleep at night – that he is falling apart. His "center of gravity" is an impossible subject position since riddles flow from the real and are endless.

On the last night before the camp is liberated, the guards are busy killing off whoever they can find. Guido warns his wife to hide and conceals Joshua in a cupboard. Just as he tucks him into his hiding spot, Guido tells the boy that he is on the verge of winning the tank. This last gambit will mean victory will be theirs. Unfortunately Guido is found out and shot. The next morning the Americans arrive: Joshua is given a ride out of the camp on a tank and is re-united with his mother.

Kristeva (1995) reminds us that freedom is possible when the signifying spaces in language are opened up (p. 222). Since our attachments to signifiers flows from imaginary spaces we must learn from the artist to resist a universalizing community of all-inclusive meanings attached to signifiers. The artistic experience is "to highlight the diversity of our identifications and the relativity of our symbolic and biological experience" (p. 223). At one point in the film a guard barks out orders to the prisoners, telling them what is to be expected of them and the consequences of disobedience. Guido is asked to translate (pretending he understands German). Instead of translating the guard's instructions, he uses this as an opportunity to explain the rules of his game. Joshua looks on, convinced that *the game* is on. "First one to get 1,000 points wins!"

To enter the Symbolic is to be risk having one's jouissance disarticulated from possible expression and fulfillment. As described in earlier chapters, the exemplar of such a castration is the discourse of the Master where the slave works for the jouissance of the Master. [7] Like Guido, what teachers continue to struggle for is a source of localism that can be used as a fulcrum against the hubris of master signifiers such as "accountability" and "outcomes." There can be much more than a ludic response to the foreclosures of the culture of performance. By definition the educational process always produces outcomes. By permitting the master signifiers of "outcomes" to be populated by chains of signification such as *external measures*, *standards* and *school rankings*, educators and parents lose the opportunity for jouissance. "Quality education" becomes the Master enjoying its own reason.[8] Under the growing emphasis on external testing the possibility for imagining what is worth knowing is increasingly a psychic exercise in ventriloquism where students give back the Master's own reflection. Yet teachers are resisting the foreclosure of their work by the invocation for 'external accountability'.[9]

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[7] This relation was described in Chapter 7 where the work of teachers who struggled to improve their students' test scores. The external examination gains its legitimacy by teachers preparing students to anticipate what sorts of questions will be asked. Read as an autopoietic system, the external examinations also represent an example of the blind Master enjoying his own reason.

[8] In Alberta, the publication of provincial exam averages for high schools has been met with derision by some parent groups and the teachers' professional association. In 'research' funded by the Fraser Institute (*Edmonton Journal*, August 14, 1999) such school rankings are published by newspapers who claim to be simply providing information to the public. Such a claim is extremely problematic given the fact that performance on these examinations is determined by a whole host of variables that need to be analyzed at the school site level. The invocation of the Master to compare and rank does at times come back to haunt it. When the Alberta government was confronted by statistics indicating that average birth weights for newborns was declining in the face of health care cuts and rising poverty levels, a spokesperson for the health department discounted the data, suggesting instead that "long term trends" were far more significant (*Edmonton Journal*, August 31, 1999). The discursive ploy here is simply to erase the individual bodies of newborns as 'anomalies' that will 'average out' over time.

What I am gesturing towards in this reading of Guido's agency is what Kristeva frames as "an ethics aware of its own sacrificial order" (p. 223). As with any effort to achieve agency in the Symbolic Order, teaching is about pursuing the death drive. Every choice is a burden, every decision what to teach and what not to teach, is a form of castration.[10] In many ways, too, we construct hiding places for our selves and our students.

Everyday as teachers, we are given the opportunity to re-populate the signifiers with new meanings.[11] I draw from Bracher (1993) a place for teacher commitment within a project of a psychoanalytic mode of cultural criticism (p. 78). Such a project looks for the seat of desire in the particular investments and identifications individuals and groups bring to the ways that public education is imagined and represented. For example, the valorization of "choice" and "competition" is, I have argued, imbued in the discourse of the Master, seeks nothing more than evacuate difference – the very thing it claims to be fighting for.[12]

Lacan reminds us that humans desire *being*, but this being never really coincides with life (Bracher, 1993, 173). We struggle for things that will recognize us and hope that in these objects we will find jouissance. We come into the Symbolic world tethered to our lack, and as we move into the strict realism of the everyday life we struggle to maintain an erect posture in the face of the Big Other (Žižek, 1992, p. 59). As with Guido, the comic hero of *Life is Beautiful*, we do not fully "grasp" the empty rules we are given. They grasp us but cannot contain us.

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[9] See for example the National Coalition of Education Activists is one prominent example of a grassroots organization that is speaking back to the discourses of high stakes testing.

[10] I am skirting here huge issues Žižek (1994) raises concerning "the tension between the public Law and its obscene superego underside." Often the support of policies we secretly object to generates the sense of guilt that makes the formation of the subject possible. Living in an *impasse* is the obscene tension we feel.

[11] Parents too can play a critical role in this project of resignification. A Calgary, Alberta group of parents (PACT: Parents Advocating for Children) is calling for "quality education" that recognizes that quality means more than "job-readiness skills" and performance on external examinations. (Liane Faulder, *Edmonton Journal*, August 12, 1999).

[12] Benjamin Barber (1995) makes this point in his argument that transnational corporations such as Coca Cola and McDonalds, by flattening out cultural differences globally, is really about a struggle for the soul.

In the mid-1980's Van Manen wrote about "the experience of hope" being lost through the growing call for structure and accountability – a "technocratic" vision that was more about "administrative convenience" rather than about "what it means to hope for children entrusted" to our care as teachers (1985, p. 198).

Shapiro (1992) reminds us,

> there is a certain primordial stupidity to the body, a weird inertness and passivity, something that freely offers itself to all the categories of thought and representation, allows them to invest it and pass through it, yet somehow always effortlessly evades them (p. 207).

"Bodies are not placeless, monadic," they are "sites of enunciation and cultural inscription" that schools and educators tend to ignore (McLaren, 1995, pp. 63-69). As McLaren senses in the rising "predatory culture" of global capitalism that educators find themselves today, it becomes increasingly important for teachers to take up a pedagogy of enfleshment, to recognize the "mutually constituted enfolding of social structure and desire" (p. 63). The central challenge McLaren (1995) sees for teachers is probably the source of their greatest strength and opportunity – to claim a vision of "an embodied hope, an informed hope as we face the dawn of a new century" (p. 84).

> The hope that is critical pedagogy rests with those educators who keep its languages and practices alive in *corpore* while taking account of changing historical contexts and the specificity and limitations of difference... in the over-dramatization of the ordinary, the aesthetization of politics, and the "crotch-drenching intensity" of love expressed as a sublime national duty to preserve "family values." America, we are vulnerable to a fascist seduction of our volatized, hysterical bodies into cool, laid back, nonchalant bodies – perfect bodies. Perfect for what? For living out a soft-core fascist drama as a corporate warlord? Or an aerobics instructor in a G-string? (p. xx).

We live in the negative that produces possibility. Put another way, our ego identifications and the imperatives of big Other, do not strictly reveal the commitments we *have*, but those we *are*, the commitments that are "subject for us" (Kegan, 1994, pp. 161-162).

No Defence

A week has passed since my defense. It is a Saturday morning and the last few days have been a mixture of relief and sadness. I am sitting here looking at the 'last lines'. I have finished proofreading one 'last time', checking for errors, slips and omissions. Checking, always checking. One of my committee members found 600 typos. I was dumb-founded. I apologize to my committee for my recklessness. I have nothing to say. No defense. So I thread my way back through the text, making the corrections, finding even more. I make the changes to finish the 'final copy'. I get to the last lines, yet I want to refuse them their place as the 'last lines' several tries before I get them 'right'. I grow frustrated with the imbecility of each of my feeble attempts at writing, to get things 'just right'.

Another member of my committee helpfully suggests that I need to write something that will bring "some closure" to my dissertation. "Try writing a letter to a friend, something informal if you like." I recall blurting out during the defense that "I have moved beyond what I wrote before." So what does this mean? Where do I stand now? Am I on any firmer ground? What do I make of my hope for my commitment as a teacher?

The suggestion to bring some closure to the dissertation seems beguiling to me. Lacan (1993) reminds me that the impulse to get things right is the "primordial manifestation of communication" (p. 39). So I start to write in a way that does not attempt to contain the ambivalences that I raised throughout these pages. I try to construe who the audience might be. A friend? But all of my friends would find this text quite bizarre. My closest friend finds Lacan and psychoanalysis a "bunch of crap." I live in the simultaneity of different worlds. What about my family? My family finds my interest in academic life quaint, at best, and of marginal relevance. And what of my colleagues? Why would they be interested in wading through all of this?

I am sitting here stuck sensing my enthusiasm for writing this letter waning. I grow ambivalent both about the request to write this fictive letter and my own inability to know where to start.

Ambivalence is anger without enthusiasm. I get frustrated; I cannot think of the letter to write. Why? I wrote so much before. I cannot read this request in any other way than to acknowledge, yet again, the absence of the ultimate signifier in my work, much like the dissertation I defended a few short days ago. This letter will remain like my dissertation, yet another remnant of what remains unspoken.

So I try to write the letter. It begins…

> As I read over the text I am struck by how far away and how close events seem. I write now from a very different location. I have left teaching and I am now working for a teachers' professional organization as a consultant. My days are now filled with the quiet murmur of phone calls, office chatter and meetings with teachers. I desperately miss working with students – the bodies in the hallways that refuse to be contained by the thing we call school. Now I am here and the events of the past are there. In between these places I write these lines. Now I work in an organization that faces its own internal and external challenges…

I try to keep writing this letter but I cannot. Maybe it is because this entire dissertation is already in the form of a letter. Perhaps it is a letter to myself and/or the members of my supervising committee who have acted as mentors and critical friends. In a Lacanian sense, perhaps this text, written over the last two years, has been a letter continually arriving at its destination. I can be no other than at the place of where I am now.

The fundamental contribution of psychoanalysis is the possibility that we can undo things (symptoms) with words (Žižek, 1996b). Of course nothing I have written has freed me from the psychic forces at work on my subjectivity. Action research informed by psychoanalysis needs to reject the modernist project that assumes the possibility of the self shaping itself. At best, as Žižek suggests, our agency lies in recognizing the raw violence that is done to us (and that what we do to the Other) by the virtue of being alive. Any decision to act suffers from an kind of 'active forgetting'. Psychoanalysis reminds us that it is precisely because we recognize ourselves (and the Other) as 'incomplete' that we have agency. Action research can take from Lacan, the recognition that my self and the Other exist as 'two lacks'. We live in the paradox of knowing that the 'truly free' decisions we make are often times unconscious. Žižek (1996b) draws on the example of love. The decision to love somebody is never a fully present and conscious one that we control. " I can never say to myself: 'Now I will decide to fall in love with this person…' – all I can do in the present is to ascertain that the decision has already been taken and that I am caught in the inexorable necessity to love" (212). An analogous situation exists in the bureaucratic structures where teachers work. Often times we know the learning conditions for students are intolerable, yet we make due. We can do no other, living in structural necessity to do whatever one can within the violent hierarchies that we are implicated in by virtue of our decision[13] to try to teach.

Our agency does have effects on the Real, but these remain elusive and radically contingent. So here I remain. Still hopeful. Still caught in the grip of the foundational demand of teachers' work: to make a future possible.

Now I find myself in a place working in a teacher organization that shares a familiar fantasy, one that the public place called school will continue to thrive as a community that refuses to irrecoverably define itself. Maybe that is why I have been enamoured with the ideal of 'community' for so long. 'Community' is an aesthetic possibility that is richest when it refuses to specify itself. I share this ambiguity in order to avoid the disappointment of ever knowing the Other completely. Like Guido's sacrifice in *Life Is Beautiful*, it is in the closing possibility of *what might be* that I become invested. I recall my tears at the end of the film, a gesture to my own inassimilable hope for my own three children, and too, for my students who are other peoples' children.[14] This is the fantasy that children might have a life that is greater than any hope I can imagine for myself.

On a personal level, my limitations, and ultimately my failures, momentarily blind my fantasies. My children remain both 'self' and 'other'. I recall a particular difficult moment when my son was diagnosed with a life-threatening condition when he was 17 years old. Facing a twelve-hour operation that he might not survive, I recall being unable to say anything remotely sufficient, not even "goodbye." There was 'no-thing' I could say. All I could do was be there, present, in my inconsolable crying; holding his hand in what could have been a last gesture between the two of us. A gesture that had more meaning than we could contain.

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[13] From the Latin, "decision" draws its roots from *deci*, to 'cut away'. In a Lacanian sense here we are reminded that any decision includes as much it excludes. Any act carries with it the violence of repressing certain elements of 'reality'. A colleague whose students did extremely well on provincial examinations admitted to me "the exams are a cruel joke but what else I do – I love teaching too much to quit."

[14] Madeline Grumet employed this turn of phrase in a class she conducted at the University of Alberta in the summer of 1993.

Derrida writes that the agency of crying is a "revelatory blindness" that indicates that the eyes see more than they can possibly contain (as cited in Jay, 1994, p. 523). Crying gestures both a beginning and ending of seeing. My tears over Guido's sacrifice lay in the inassimilable possibilities that were ahead for his child. The libidinal economy of the film works most powerfully when it refuses to define what this hope might look like. All that remains, at the end of the film, is the receding of the Symbolic – the big Other recedes as the vanishing mediator emerges and overwhelms me. As with the paradoxical relation to *objet a*, if we ever achieve our demand, desire recedes. My tears mark both the acceptance and failure of recognizing what I can do for the Other and my self.

Tears invoke the pain of what is seen but cannot be contained by the Symbolic. The gaze cannot contain the libidinous energy that quivers in the face of the Other who implores me with the question: *will the future be possible?*

Action research is always about trying to make a future possible. As I look back over the case studies I have described, I recognize that, after the fact, I have always thanked the terror that brings change. Much of writing this dissertation has been a gesture that acknowledges what is missing in my life. In many ways my ambivalence about 'finishing' this text reveals the power of the Imaginary. I always imagined the text would be somehow better than it is. Perhaps my own ambivalence flows from the capacity of the Imaginary to contain so much contradiction. In order to contain the libidinal energy of the drives, my Imaginary fills me with the narcissistic demand that I can create something bigger than myself.

Yet a text expresses more than it contains. However, now that it is 'finished', it seems smaller than it could have been. As I wrote the earlier drafts, the thought that the dissertation was unfinished kept open the possibility that it would 'be better' at some point in the future. This imagined possibility was an excessive presence that kept me writing. The possibility of it 'being better than it was' recognizes the Lacanian remnant. Such a hope is, of course, the stuff of fantasy. By its very nature, fantasy is that which "sticks out…of the symbolic structure" (Žižek, 1992, p. 89). This remnant is what is left over when the demand is realized for what it is, the misrecognition that desire can ever be satiated. Now the text is 'finished' and this fantasy has slipped away into the grim reality that I see as the 'final version'.

The remnant I remain is that I continue to imagine *the future* as an object that calls me to fill its *lack*. I live in between two lacks: my own and the future's. 'Commitment', infused by Lacanian psychoanalysis, calls me to become a stranger to my demand, to my hope for tomorrow. As Caputo (1987) writes, the loss of hope, the occurrence of a *dis-aster* (from the Greek 'lost star'), reminds us that the world is an "other that has no regard for us" (pp. 16-17). It is in giving way to this void, to this center of existence that has no concern for us, that we begin to understand the incapacity of the Symbolic to permanently fix our 'star'. Perhaps this dissertation remains as a palimpsest that maps my recognition of this Lacanian turn.

Teacher commitment is fed by fantasies that lie outside Reason and the suture of the Symbolic regime. Zen Buddhism makes a similar gesture in its claim that human possibility is found in between the irreconcilable places of desire and prohibition (Moncaya, 1998, pp. 123-129). In the postmodern condition, the point is not that there is no place for hope or fantasy. On the contrary, it is in living in-between the two impossible places of *desire* and *prohibition* where our beginnings begin.

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